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NATVRE IN A CITY YARD

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Nature in a City Yard

Nature in a City Yard

SOME RAMBLING
DISSERTATIONS THEREUPON

BY
CHARLES M. SKINNER

AUTHOR OF "MYTHS AND LEGENDS OF OUR OWN LAND,"
"VILLON, THE VAGABOND" (A PLAY), ETC.

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THIS BOOK I DEDICATE TO

MY WIFE.

IF OUR YARD HAS SOME TASTE OF THAT
FIRST GARDEN, IT IS BECAUSE SHE
WALKS THERE. SHE TOUCHES
THE EARTH AND ROSES
SPRING FROM IT.

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NATURE IN A CITY YARD

NATURE IN A CITY YARD

I

THE YARD

IT is a common city yard, about eighteen feet by fifty. Part of it has to be given up to clothes and lines on Monday, and during the rest of the week it is a repository for broken toys belonging to Clarence and Harold, the younger members of the family, and an occasional and surreptitious tomato-can, emptied of the material that might make it interesting. The cans we firmly replace in the yards of the neighbors who sent them. It is a yard, too, that is loved by tuneful cats; and even a Newfoundland dog, owned by a carpenter behind us, bounces over the five-foot board fence now and then, alighting with exactitude on a bed of gladiolus, so that the

flowering of that plant is a surprise, and we lay little wagers as to whether or not there will be a bloom this year.

The zoölogy of the district likewise comprises English sparrows, slimy slugs, and earth-worms. Mosquitos call whenever the wind brings them in from the fens of Long Island and the meadows of New Jersey; and we are liable to have flies. There are beetles, gnats, fire-flies, centipedes, and a rarely visible mouse. In flower time we enjoy the company of bees, both honey and bumble, vagrom wasps, and hornets and moths and butterflies in great numbers.

Then, let 's see: we have a cricket or two, and a periodical delegation of grasshoppers. We have stocked the place with three toads and a turtle. The ability of these citizens to hide themselves in a space so small is wonderful. As to minor denizens and visitors, their name is legion, and they are a corrupt, unconscionable, pernickety lot. They are the aphides, the common plant-lice that prey by myriads on the poppies and chrysanthemums, the

wood-lice or sow-bugs, the rose-bugs, the McGonigle boy, the caterpillars that strip the zinnias, the blue beetles on the asters, the mealy bugs that spread over the cacti, the scale that dot the palms, the hard-shelled, many-legged wire-worms that burrow through and kill the roots of bachelor-buttons, and our experimental louseworts, coiling like ammonites when shaken out; and we stir up potato-bugs and seventeen-year locusts when we gather our hay crop with a lawn-mower.

But while the flora and fauna of the region are not exciting or numerous, there are more of both than you would suspect from the local geography. The yard is bounded on the north by the carpenter's yard, with its piles of lumber; on the east by a board fence and a lilac-bush; on the west by small boys and a gravel dump — on the far side, to be sure, of three other yards; on the south by the two-story and basement brick house where we live.

The house is one of a row that has uniformity without duplication, and is supplied with all modern improvements except com-

fort, low rent, protection from the weather, and a few other matters. Every second or third house in this row has what appears from the front to be a small, windowless gable. But it is n't. It is a flimsy half pyramid of tin and wood, about four feet high; and the rent of a house crowned with this ornament is two dollars a month extra.

Our neighbors are peaceable, orderly people, for the larger part, though one or two of them do play popular marches on the piano with their windows open. But on every block in a city, as in every village in the country (the number of inhabitants in each case averaging the same), there is sure to be a boy who is the scorn, the by-word, and to a certain extent the terror, of the whole community. The boy on our row who contains sin, vicariously, for the rest of us is Reginald McGonigle, the son of a contractor who is fairly well off through his political privileges, and who has moved in among us, to the general uneasiness. He —Michael, not Reginald—sits on his door-step in his shirt sleeves at evening, smoking

cigars when he has company and a clay pipe when alone. Reginald goes out with a tin pail to a saloon on another street from two to five times daily. Asked by one of us why he did so, he said he was going for yeast; then he thrust out his chin, extruded his lower lip with his tongue, looked intensely cross-eyed, pressed his thumb at the tip of a blunt and dirty nose, and gave a waving motion to his fingers. Reginald is about ten years of age, and wears knickerbockers and a cap; but there is no form of sin known to centenarians with which he is not on terms of contemptuous familiarity.

He has freckles, small, round eyes, sullen brows, two of his upper teeth are always conspicuous, his hair is full of tumult and suggestions, his clothes are expensive but never clean, his voice is loud and harsh, his manner imperative, and he is strong for his age. When interrupted in a burglary or a murder, he looks at the remonstrant with majestic calm, and after hearing him out deigns no reply, but proceeds with his crime. If, however, any one re-

proaches him with a horsewhip or a howitzer, he exhibits a pair of brisk legs, and disappears into his own stronghold, from the windows of which he leans directly after, and offers shrill and reprehensible criticisms. It is the joy of his life to injure animals when he cannot injure people; and not a dog or cat in the vicinage but takes to flight when he appears. He has broken more windows and street lamps, trampled more flowers, secreted for his own behoof more of other boys' marbles, knives, and pennies, blackened more eyes, torn down more fences, appropriated more ash-barrels for bonfires, smeared mud on more little girls' dresses, frightened more babies, put tar on more door-steps, run off with more bicycles, misdirected more callers and delivery-wagons, and is oftener trespassing on other people's premises, than all of the other children in the street. When his parents are visited by an indignant committee, they ask him if the charges against him are true, and he modestly admits that they are not. So the parents turn the eye of astonishment on the visi-

tors, and the incident is closed. The police have been appealed to several times; but Captain Muldoon, of our precinct, is Mrs. McGonigle's cousin, and, somehow, nothing seems to get itself done. The McGonigle oasis in our otherwise slow neighborhood is a fateful fixity.

Our yard, though partly grown to grass and clothes-lines and footprints, is bordered with beds; and we have a diamond-shaped space near the house for pelargoniums, or "Martha Washington geraniums," other geraniums, and coleus. You might not believe that we had nearly sixty varieties of plant in bloom there at once in warm weather, and that the orchids hanging on the house wall above the kitchen windows, and in a shady corner, in pots, flourished in spite of the forebodings of florists, and even made bold, some of them, to blossom in a window next winter. People think because some orchids cost a thousand dollars, and perish as soon as you get them home,— true vegetable aristocrats,— that two-dollar orchids must die as promptly and with equal emphasis, especially if

they are left to do a little healthy roughing it.

It took an appalling amount of toil to soften the yard into shape for agriculture. We discovered, after moving, that the whole block stood on "made land" which had been dumped into a hollow. But "land" is a relative term. Oh, yes; there is some sand and there are some pebbles and some rocks in the soil; but its richness and charm are in effete hardware, bed-springs, ashes, bottles, bones, oyster-shells, decayed wood, hoop-skirts, bird-cages, silk dresses, china — in fact, I do not think of many familiar objects that we have not extracted from our yard in spading up the flower-beds. We took up, at a depth of hardly more than a foot, a set of false teeth. (Archæologists to whom we showed these relics thought that they did not belong to the Indians.) At another time I extracted a piece of glass with a lovely soap-bubble effect on its surface, like that on the old tear-bottles and ointment-jars of Cyprus. It was not a tear-bottle,— I think it had held a grief too strong for tears when it was whole,— but

the iridescence acquired in a few years under ground showed that one does not have to go to the east, nor even to the London fakirs, for opalescent glass. Nor does one have to go to the country for some greenery and flowers.

II

SKY

ONE thing you cannot deprive us of entirely when you put up your houses and factories and churches around us, and that is the sky. You may poison the air for us close to the earth with your smudge, gas, vapor, dust, and evil cookery; but we can always look out from our wells of brick and see the air away up where it is untainted — a sheet of sapphire or turquoise, with pearl or silver fretting; iriscent, too, for there is a surprising amount of color in clouds.

The other day one of the grandest mountain-ranges above the world was revealed after the passage of a hurrying mist. The Himalayas boast no such peaks as the afternoon sun fell upon when the fog floor had been rafted off on a western wind.

They reached for miles toward the zenith, and spread north and south for leagues on leagues. Their tops were dazzling white, and their sides were ruffled into countless snowy bosses, softly edged with gray and mauve; while descending valleys and caverns, that would have held the nations of the earth, were revealed in slaty shadow. From a height of perhaps a thousand feet hung a long curtain of dark, which at its northern end was pulled aside as if by an impetuous giant hand. It hid the base of the mountain-range, and seemed to be made of rain. Not until next day did we learn of the cyclone that had worked in that belt of dark, felling houses and trees within five miles of us, and then bounding up and whistling away to sea.

We lose much fine scenery because of our habit of looking down. We look down so much because that is where most of the dollars come from.

A friend whose word I never had cause to doubt, and whose any statement was as good as gospel, nearly strained my credulity once, and I made him tell the thing

over to be sure I had heard aright. He was walking in a park on a balmy day, delighting in the May-time budding and twitter, when he met an acquaintance who was taking a short cut across the park from his house to his shop. After the manner of our kind, my friend nodded to the tradesman, and said it was a fine morning. The tradesman looked up in a casual way, as if he had heard the statement before and agreed to it; then, catching a glimpse of the blue, as he raised his head out of his commercial meditations, he asked, "That 's what you call the sky, is n't it?" And he was sincere about it, apparently.

One of the occasional benefits of town life is the chance to get up into the fifteenth or twentieth story of one of our office-buildings and look at the sky. It does not strain your neck in that way. It is nearly equivalent to being on a hill-top. It makes us feel as if some oxygen had suddenly entered the atmosphere, and as if we had found room to open our lungs. Our imaginations feel the widening of our environment, and our eyes are so constantly

invited to the distance that I wonder how any work is done in the top floors of the sky-scrapers of New York, where the clerks have only to look up from their letters and ledgers to see the rolling country of Long Island, the Orange Hills, the glittering harbor with its islands, and the hurrying rivers. But poets ought to be made in such an eyrie.

When we look away to the horizon we gladly cheat ourselves; we let our fancies wander into things that are not there. Beneath those heavy cumuli must be a country where the people are good and wise, where there are no Reginald McGonigles, where every home is a palace, where speech is music, art the daily life, and love instead of self-interest the cohesive social force. But we go and stand under those clouds; then we discover that Utopia is some leagues farther on, and Arcadia some miles behind us.

It is not often that we appreciate the size of clouds. You may see them in Colorado so much bigger than the Rocky Mountains that the tallest peaks become

insignificant by contrast. Warmed air is constantly rising from the earth, and as it ascends toward the chill of the immensities, the moisture it holds condenses into fog and occasionally into rain. The upper edge of the bed of warm air defines its shape by the form of the cloud-bottoms that rest upon it. Floors of heavy cloud average level; but there are innumerable protuberances and depressions. At the top, the air being thinner, the clouds expand into any shape they please. Away up, miles overhead, where the air is too light to contain or support masses like the cumuli, the vapor feathers into cirri. The cumuli, the summer clouds, which deepen into thunder-heads, are Alpine in their scenery and imposing in their volume; but there is something equally fine in the cirrus when it is drawn into streams of pallid white, like the banners flung from the top of the world and blown by electric currents into our heavens. Indeed, on some nights, when the sky is charged with cirri that faintly reflect the city lights, it is hard to say whether or no they are the au-

rora borealis; for with gas-lights and lamps and electric glares in one's eyes, it is not easy to see whether they are pulsing. Only after midnight, from our yard, can I be sure of this.

These streams of cirrus cloud must be of enormous length sometimes. You realize it when you see their parallel lines drawn together in each direction at the horizon, like ridges on a muskmelon. But they are not drawn together. They appear so to us because they are in perspective, as the sides of a street run together toward the vanishing-point; and as we can see a mountain at a distance of a hundred miles in a clear air, so in that clearer air above the humid stratum we doubtless follow these lines at least as far in each direction, or two hundred miles in all. Occasionally a cross wind scores these high clouds and combs them into sections. Then, instead of being streamers, they become endless regiments marching in platoons in the same direction as the original lines.

Occasionally, too, the cirrus is so far and thin that we do not see it in full day,

probably because we do not look for it; so we are surprised when at sunset the red lights play over a web that tents in the whole sky; and as the lights change in color and climb higher with the falling of the sun, we see that it is not merely one film of cloud, but one on another; half a dozen, perhaps. Yet we said that the sky was clear. What weak seers we are!

In storm, especially a hot-weather one, the riding up of the celestial navy to fire its bolts is a glorious sight. The sky is an inverted ocean, and whirling on its tempestuous surface come the black and threatening squadrons, pennants of darkness streaming in their wake, woolly films wreathing at their bows. They speed across the void, whirling, twisting in maelstroms, rising and falling, occasionally lost behind the black sails of swifter craft, emerging to view again, darker and more wicked than ever. Then comes the shot we listen for: the air blazes, and a roar of wrath goes out. The musketry of rain follows; and when the impenitent earth has been properly battered and drenched, the

fleet rides off to other shores, and the sun is out again with healing. But in all this time mankind has been fussing with its umbrellas and waiting in doorways for a trolley-car.

Our yard has a hammock that the children use, but that is a little too public for grown folks, unless it is after dark, or is brought near to the house. And it is an invention that ought to attach to every residence, or, rather, to some tree near it. If it could be occupied by some lazybones who would manage to keep his eyes open, there is hardly a doubt that he would accumulate some truths in the course of a summer; especially, perhaps, if he slung the hammock under the apples or the shade maples.

For the nearest approach to a new experience is to lie under a tree. It is even more strange and more an inversion of our conceit than it is to look about under water. In the bed of a river things appear much as they do when you look toward the bottom from the bank, and the distress of holding your breath after the first half

minute is likely to make you neglect the landscape; but lie flat, face up, beneath a tree (if you have n't one, a big azalea like the one in our yard will do), and you will realize that you never appreciated arboreal anatomy before. How light and strong it is, how full of lessons for engineers and builders and painters! And it is so unaccustomed; the tangents in the boughs are so unexpected; the masses of leaf, flower, and fruit are so remarkable; it is so inspiring to see that castle in the air, so light, so fairy-like, yet so sturdy and tough, with the birds and bees and butterflies seeking its entrances!

Strangest of all is that it impresses one in a vague way with a consciousness of its strength and purpose. What made it bend this bough to avoid another? Why did it thin out its leaves here, where it was likely to clash them against another branchful? You wonder if they hear and know, these trees, all that is said and done by the clumsy black beetles on two legs that crawl over their roots.

If you can't look up into a tree for ex-

perience, look at the clouds. The sky is so common a luxury that we deny it to ourselves. But if your eyes are strong, lie on a bank of wild thyme, or something, and just stare into the zenith. It is not so poetic if you have to wear blue glasses; but the light of the sun reflected from mountains of snowy cumulus, or even the far-off and filmy tissues of the cirri, nay, even the light that fills the unclouded air, is more piercing than you have supposed. So, if your eye can endure it, sprawl on the wild thyme in your yard, or in your hammock, close enough in the shadow of the house to be out of view of the neighbors, and watch those moving mountains, more vast in bulk than the Balkans, as magnificent in scenery as Greenland, piled into space for miles above your head — watch these marble domes as they are wheeled across the heavens in the wind's track, sometimes crumbling down in misty ribbons at a distance, sometimes turning black and bellowing and belching flood and fire and terror near at hand. The life of the air is a revelation. It is as much so as the life of space

as we view it through the telescope, or the life of stagnant water when we see it in the microscope, or the life in the ground when we stir the earth in spring. What are those birds that cross the vision at mountain height, mere specks against the argosies of silver? Eagles, are they, or hawks, or condors and such strange winged creatures of other lands, spying out the country? Or are they archæopteryces, plesiosauri, and pterodactyls left over from the age of saurians and afraid to come down, knowing that man, the fiercest of destroyers, would stuff them and put them into his museums? Youngsters make more use of their eyes and nature than we, and they can probably tell us more about the sky than we see. Their fresh fancies find odd creatures in the air. My youngest, standing at the window, called to his mother to look at the horses. She, hearing no sound of hoofs on the pavement, answered that there were no horses near. "Yes," he insisted; "cloud horses, galloping in the sky."

How apt these babes are in their speeches! There is beauty in their abso-

lute simplicity. It is like the poetry of the Indians. A little relative of mine died on St. Valentine's day, and one of his playmates said, "He will be God's Valentine, mama." Harold, in the yard, says, "The dandelions are getting old: see their white hair." Like all infants, he amuses us by the quaintness and unexpectedness of his observations. Seeing a hearse returning from a funeral with the driver's official tile inside, he whispered impressively, "That man's going to bury his hat." And talking of a young man who speaks in a meek, high soprano, he informed us that "Mr. E—— had feathers in his voice."

Even a town yard is incomplete without children. They are trying, sometimes, and they do not value the pet plants as you do; but you may console yourself with the thought that if they did not break them, Reginald McGonigle would; and if he did n't, the beetles, caterpillars, lice, and worms would eat them. The views of youngsters on nature and mankind are the only original ones that we hear.

To look skyward again: One night, after

the passage of a thunder-storm, I looked southward, and there, through the haze, appeared a long jag of lightning photographed on the sky. It did not flicker: it simply stayed. It was much more startling than a lively flash. And two or three seconds elapsed before I made out that the seam of pale light was merely the edge of a cumulus cloud, high up, showing through a rift in the reek, and lighted by a moon invisible from the earth.

And these things are seen as easily in the town as in the country, and we make a pretense of liking them as well through the window as in the pasture. Perhaps the restriction of our ground scenery forces attention to the sky. I know that certain sunsets and sunrises have been beautiful, though roofs and spires have risen against them. I know that the fan of sunbeams piercing holes in a cloud blanket — what country people call "the sun drawing water" — is at least as striking from the yard as it is when I see it from the favorite hill in Vermont, though one cannot see the lighted spots in the landscape where these

rays fall. I know that when snow flies the flakes spring out of the gray emptiness in the same bewildering way as in the fields, and that each flake is as marvelous a crystal as if it fell in Canada. I know that even in these dull precincts the color splendors of the clouds are as obvious as in the country—and as unregarded. We seldom realize these colors. But put a tub of water in the yard on a cloudy day, stand where the sun is reflected in it, and as the clouds pass watch this water mirror and mark how they kindle. They do not show rainbows, but delicate and shelly lusters, fleeting, tender, fairy-like. You can bear to see these reflections, because the whole sky is not blazing into your eyes. Then, the clear, open firmament: nothing is finer. The winter of space is suggested, merely, and glorified in the turquoise, windy skies of autumn.

It is in autumn that there is a kind of glow in the air as well as in the trees. The leaves seem to throw their color to the sky, where it is reflected back upon the earth, as the white of a polar ice-cap shines into

the clouds above it. And this is not all illusion, for the soothing sun loses its heat-rays, and the chemical light that comes through the air is red.

Looking skyward one is face to face with eternity. How futile, yet inevitable, to put the questions suggested to himself and to unanswering space and time by that vision! He tries to think back to the time in eternity when matter did not exist, and concludes it always did exist. And he wonders if the universe is evolution or creation. And is order mind, or has mind developed from order? And in the future suns burn out, only to have their ashes swept up by comets, scouts and scavengers of space, and hurled together with such fury that they become gaseous with heat, condense, reform into suns and planets, and the drama goes on again, endlessly. With a spectator? Ah, useless to ask and wonder. Truth is in a well, so deep she cannot come to us, nor we descend to her. Let us be content to love and admire, create and maintain, live and improve. It is all—and the best—we can do.

III

CITY AND COUNTRY LIFE

OUR yard is only an epitome of and substitute for the real thing, which is the country. I do not live in town because I want to, but because I must. The trade I learned can be practised only in town; its pay is apt to be so restricted that retirement on one's savings from the practice of it is practically unheard of; and I want to educate the children. There are no groves of Academus, or I would pack them off forthwith, and perhaps occupy some adjacent cabin, and devote myself to raising potatoes and Cain for their Saturday holiday. In the nearly hopeless hope of some day having a home in the village of my fathers, there being free to deal saucily with mankind and take walks, I find few sympathizers; for is not art more than

nature? man more than mountains? much acquaintance more than few? No,—to each of these propositions. A mob is physically and mentally repellent to me, and its clothes and its behavior have little to do with this repugnance. Nature means liberty, and liberty means life.

Mr. Bellamy's hopeful but fanciful economy has not considered one of the origins for the evils that threaten us: crowding. Americans are growing afraid of that wholesome rural life that gave force and composure to their fathers, and that is reflected so sweetly by the English and New England writers. They are falling into the town habit, which, like most habits, grows by what it feeds on, and is commonly acquired by crediting the fallacy that life, society, gaiety, art, letters, learning, and all forms of progress come of physical aggregation.

What force is in numbers, except brute force? Because we do justice, keep order, and claim privileges for each other, does it follow that we must associate with all men, including dirty men, mean men,

drunken men? Our very admiration for the best human qualities makes the lower of them more offensive. Cream comes to the top of big pans, but you get as much of it from half the quantity of milk if the quality is twice as good. Cities cast their best people to the top, perhaps; but how many sordid folks a single wise man stands for; how much poverty is required to make a rich man; how few are good and gentle, compared with the rough and vulgar; and how little the goodness of the few benefits the many! Yet the plague of it is that a company of quiet and congenial people is not allowed to settle by itself. Directly it has done so, those round about cry, "Hello! here 's a chance to get into a jam!" and they edge their way in until the original settlers are fain to make their way out.

Aggregation presupposes weakness in the individual. The farmer not only sows, reaps, hoes, and gathers, but he drives nails, saws wood, keeps accounts, cuts ice, kills pigs, is trustee of the village library, and deacon in the church. He is the best

type of man we have, because he is a man whose expediences are so many that he suffices to himself. He lives his own life, and leaves strong sons to man the cities. If he were in town he would stick at some one trade, or some department of a trade, and hire his nailing, sawing, accounting, and killing; for in the specialization of business, begotten of large manufactures, the city man's limitations of industry are narrowing every year. When one has not self-poise to stand by himself, or to do his work without company, he topples into a town, and the neighbors help him as he helps the neighbors: they wedge together, so that none may tip over.

The coarseness of city life is usually sorest to those who are best able to keep aloof. It is courted by those who would be better away from it: the tenement population. The drinking, the fighting, the yelling, the sickness, closeness, vice, ignorance, and slum politics disgust the visitor; but the resident glories in them, for to him they express society.

Wretched is that man who has no re-

sources within himself, who accepts any company rather than no company, who is afraid to be alone, who sits by the hour on the door-step of a seething barrack, surveying a landscape of rookeries, pavements, telegraph-poles, and ash-barrels, breathing stenches, thinking leanly and meanly, hearing the din made by harsh and dirty thousands, because that is society. Wretched is that man who must ride only on drags or in dog-carts, in certain avenues; who must dress three times a day, wear a monocle, carry his cane head down, call only on certain people, always be dancing, talking, driving — who, in short, must live for show; for that, too, is supposed to be necessary to society.

The desertion of the country, with its health, its beauty, its freedom, its practical charms of cheapness and room, must change the character of the people. It may not be true that the rapid life and the wear of incessant noise in town are shortening our years and enfeebling our nerves; but it is certain that the American of to-day has not the content and calm that belonged to

his ancestors; that he is not a fruitful parent; that his pleasures, being artificial, are taken in hot, crowded rooms; and that jealousy and rivalry are more common than they were.

If crowding has the merits that are claimed for it, we ought to see its result. A certain glib smartness is more common than it used to be, but illiteracy is not decreasing, and as to the great results of scientific investigation and artistic aspiration, how many in the crowd are touched by them? How many of New York's east-side million know about, or are advantaged by, the work of the painters, statuaries, architects, poets, dramatists? How many of them ever heard of Huxley, Darwin, Emerson, Edison, Pasteur, Röntgen, the men who move the world; and how many of the world-movers could think or act in the throng? Fancy Emerson meditating in the clatter of a hotel, Edison perfecting his inventions in a city office, Darwin making scientific investigations in a "flat" or a boarding-house! Even the actor, by nature and calling the most social of the ar-

tists, has to gain seclusion to think out his part, invent action, and memorize text.

To leave that abode of greed, envy, anxiety, and excess, the modern town, with its extremes of wealth and poverty, for an hour of country life — life with trees, rocks, streams, and tuneful, uncomplaining things — is paradise. One gets back the health of a tired mind, and more minds are tired now than in our fathers' day. If it wearies a man to be with gentler, wilder organisms than men, the reason is that he is incomplete and does not think, read, study, observe, eat, sleep, walk, or work as a healthy man should. He flings himself before society, and demands to be amused.

What is the cure, or is there none? Persuasion accomplishes nothing. In hard times, when thousands are asking food, clothing, and coal from the thrifty, and tramping the roads declaring their distress, the farmers cannot get help, and families in the country cannot procure service. No offer of work is considered unless it is accompanied by a promise of society.

The villages themselves do not ask for population. They lack the local patriotism that might put them into competition with the town. They are slow to increase or improve the benefits of corporate life: good roads, trees, parks, schools, libraries, sanitary appliances, and access to the arts.

The establishment of an exile for the useless would be a blessing not to the towns alone. The crowding of the West and the filling up of trades and professions will do something to bring farming into vogue again. But perhaps increased intelligence and increased rent promise best for the restoration of rural life. It is growing more difficult every year for people of moderate incomes to remain in town under conditions that enable them to retain health and self-respect. Taxes do not increase in rate, but rents do; and the tenant who pays both gets less and less for his money as the streets fill up and his air and light are taken away.

The saddest part of the town habit is the injury it entails on children. Young folks want earth to sport on and oxygen to

breathe, as plants do; and they get a few feet of pavement where they play ball when the police are not looking. The poor creatures become like animals in cages, and their delight in grass, trees, hills, and running waters, when they reach them, is pathetic. Their parents cheat them of their birthright.

Pessimism, which we find in all forms of art,—even in the drama, which has brought an Ibsen, a Zola, a Sudermann, and a Maeterlinck to its service,—is a philosophy of exhaustion. It is as foreign to the natural man as it would be to brutes. That it is not accepted by the masses is hopeful; that many are acquiring country places and prolonging their vacations, is hopeful; that a new interest has been aroused in science — nature — is hopeful; that fresh-air funds have been started in every city, is most hopeful. Out of the great hives of brick and mortar another generation may send away many to live in health, to think their own thought, to become the staminates of a mushy and ineffectual society. In that generation the delights

of independent living will be appreciated once more.

Meeting some country people, and noting how little they seem to care for nature, how concerned they are with small things, how their ambitions turn toward the city, one feels that he must look for a human balance, like that of the rotation of crops, the town folk returning to the country to restore their exhausted energies, say every fifty years, and the rustics going to town, in exchange, with their high vitality and their practical ways and sense, to run the affairs of society. Yet we mistake when we charge invariable discontent against the farmer. He may have a silly notion, like others of us, that he would like to be President; but he does not consent to stand behind a counter or scribble at a desk in order to do it. Sometimes he really enjoys the health and liberty and landscape to which he is heir, and envies the citizen not a whit. One of the unlikeliest converts to rural life that I have met is a peddler, fifty-eight years old, who, having lost an arm in a railroad accident, gains a pre-

carious livelihood by selling brushes and pills through New Jersey, lower New York, and eastern Pennsylvania.

I quickly found that condolences were thrown away on him. He prided himself on the extent of his acquaintance, and the fact that many of the farmers cheerfully gave him a meal and lodging when he appeared. He was particular about his lodging. Beds he did not countenance; but a blanket on the porch or in the hay-mow suited him exactly. He believed in the virtues of air, and when storm-bound in the mountains made no bones of lying under a rock or fallen tree,— however much his bones may have made of him,— with a burning log at his feet. He had not been ill for an hour since he began his wandering life. The tramps never worried him, and he was able to sell enough to keep out of the poorhouse. In winter he lived on a farm with a man who drove a butcher's wagon, and had no legs.

This little old man, with his butternut clothes, had no book education; but there was a marked sympathy with nature in

him. While we talked together, he strolled to and fro. Noticing the stars,— it was after nine o'clock at night,— he said that he often did his tramping after sunset in summer, "because it was n't so hot then"; and in spite of his years, his short legs, his basket, and his calls, he occasionally made twenty miles in a day. Of all men, to his mind, the farmers were the best off, because, while the rich might lose everything in a bad season, the farmer had his roof, his fire-wood, and his food. With these he could defy the fates. He wanted little of cities. He had seen a building thirteen stories high, and "they wanted $8 a month on the top floor, while out in Jersey you can buy a house, sheds, well, patch of ground, and orchard for $600." He reported some adventures with dogs, but few of them exciting. One night, while sleeping in an arbor, he was awakened by the arrival of another man, who passed a few words with him, and likewise lay down to sleep on a plank. In the morning he discovered that his quondam neighbor was richly dressed, and sported

a gold watch and chain. "He was sensible, that man was: he liked air." And, after all, thousands of New Yorkers sleep, or try to, in the streets on broiling, sultry August nights. Only, they don't wear gold watches.

The merit of such a life, and of all rural life, is its individualism and independence, its modesty, bravery, and self-sufficingness. Men are a part of nature, and cannot help it; yet the world is full of vain striving to get away from this fixity and fate. The men wear starched collars, narrow shoes, and hard hats, and the women wear tight foot-covering and corsets — the aim in each case being to be as little like men and women as they can. They do not care to be reminded of nature. Better the farmer, the hunter, the wood-chopper, who eats with his knife, and is at home in the woods and at one with them, than the affected, lisping, dawdling fop of the town. The clearest, if not the deepest, minds ought to be found in the country, and frankness is apt to be a rural trait. Bacon objects to a naked mind. I wonder if our

commonplaces struck him as nudities, and if he approved our social fibs as coverings. We wear only our hands and faces visible now; but commonly, when we expose the mind, there are no reservations. And of what avail are these things we say to each other or assent to about weather and politics? One look at the hills is worth the talk of a multitude as to what the weather is, because the weather is there, without comment, and all weathers have their welcomes and their uses. Woods, plains, seas, vary every hour: but how few of us know it; for, alas! we have become afraid of nature. The woods are full of bogies, the sea of krakens, the fields of malaria. Shut the windows, bar the doors, converse on politics, and keep nature out.

Content in the city is difficult. In youth it is not commendable. But when the objects of life are gained, either in money or place or occupation, when middle age fixes us in our ways, comfort of mind is to be desired. And what a rare thing is content — satisfaction with the present! We live in the past or future, memory or hope,

or in the imagination of impossibilities. Our touch with passing facts is as light as we might think our hold was on the future. Seldom in our lives do we cry, as Faust, "Stay, flying moment: thou art fair." But if the hour strikes when we may, we hear it in the country.

IV

WINTER

EXCEPT for its varying physical geography, the back yard gets little attention in winter. Perhaps it deserves to be looked at oftener, for snow will drift in fantastic shapes, and we have miniature mountain-ranges and plateaus, and, in thaws, an extensive system of lakes. Our arctic scenery does not stay arctic. Its gloss and whiteness are dulled by smoke and dust, and the feet of birds and cats, by dropped leaves of withering plants, and by the undetected yet pervading foulness of city air. And in the longest, sharpest winter the juices of the grass and shrubs are not frozen, like the surface moisture, but are merely locked in the roots until the sun calls them into the stalks, or makes new leaves to busy themselves in, when March arrives.

When it is not covered with snow, or, rather, dappled with it, the yard is dull and brown, at first glance, and the white carpet is pierced by dry stems and ragged leaves. But go out with green in your mind, and it is surprising what an answer of green you get from the earth. The kalmia's leaves are leathery, yet they keep a lot of color, and its stalks are tipped with stout buds, securely waiting the vernal equinox. The honeysuckle — indispensable plant — retains its foliage; its shiny black berries drop first, the leaves taking a slaty hue, and finally bronzing into olive. Shreds of gourd-vine hang to the fence, and the long ropes of morning-glory on the house hold hundreds of their blossom-cups, mere stars; but the green has wholly died from them. The iris fades only after repeated nippings, and the chrysanthemum has to be told often that it is winter. After the first frosts I find that the chrysanthemums, salvia, bellis, hydrangea, petunia, verbena, alyssum, daisy, and dandelion stand it best. A pet dandelion bloomed after several frosts, and another

one came into flower at Christmas, during one of the insipid winters that we have along the fortieth parallel.

But it is the grass that keeps its color best. After a succession of mild days it really grows, and under the top-dressing clover is often found to have started. Grass will become dry and brown in time, but the algæ on wood, especially on tree-trunks, never do so. They keep fresh and bright through every winter, and snow and rain serve only to intensify their color. Thoreau was nearly right when he said that it took a lichenist to see how a tree-trunk looked. He might have added — and an artist. The artist is the only one who sees things as they are. The rest of us see what we think ought to be there, and overlook many things equally important that are there.

Vegetation wants but a kindly hour to bring it up. On a February morning, in a calm between two blizzards, although it was by no means sultry, clover was found half an inch out of the earth; and three days later, in another mild spell, the warm

warble of a bird was heard across the roofs. (Pity me that I don't know what kind of a bird it was!) In mid-January, after a longish spell of cold, I have found fresh leaves of buttercup and bellis and dandelion under the mulch.

After heavy winter rains, followed by a quick freeze, the puddles crust over with ice, and the water, soaking into the earth, — partially evaporating, too, perhaps,— leaves this ice a mere shell over nothing. Where the freezing has been irregular because of wind, spiky ridges a foot and more in length — true crystals, doubtless— may be traced in the ice like Cuphic symbols on a rock. And I wonder if we have got nothing out of ice and drifts and icicles for our arts in all these years. No Gothic pendents, think you? No roofs, and eaves, and pediments? No tessellations? No mural ornaments? Art has never touched the delicacy of the frost-ferns on the window, nor reached the splendor of the Jungfrau's silver dome; but out of these things beauty may have grown into stone without even conscious effort by the architect.

They ask perpetuation, these melting glories, and his is the art to keep or convert them. Architecture appeals to more than the eye alone. It satisfies the sense for substance, greatness, permanence, such as snow hints in shining shadow. In that the builder's art is like nature. But for this solidity, the stage palace of canvas would serve our minds as well as Durham Cathedral or the Chicago Fair.

One advantage in our yard is that it gives access to the shrillest, coldest winds of winter. And though it is a mournful music, it is likewise of a brave, romantic kind. True comfort of indoors is complete only with a gale brattling at the windows. Draw the curtains, stir the fire, see the family bestowed for the night; let there be no burning of garish and vulgar gas, no dusty, choking furnaces, no thrice-abominable cracking, clinking, smelling, and roasting of steam radiators; have at your elbow a mug of something cold and bubbling, or hot and fragrant, as your taste directs; if there are no women at home, or if this is your den, have a cigar

if you like; then snuggle into your easy-chair and enjoy the concert. The booming, the gusts, the eldritch skirling,—I don't know what that means, but it sounds well and windy,—the whispering and moaning, the shaking of blinds and casings, the singsong of the air's voice, are inspiring. It is Wagner night when a zephyr achieves forty miles an hour. Those threatening sounds tell of far, cold wastes, of manful souls battling homeward on the sea, of men in lonely places doing duty in the cold; and the fire to which we go for pictures yields up a story of heroism in the mountains, on the ocean, on the plains, that the wind accompanies, and that makes us glad to be of the precious human race. Learn to love the wind. It is free, wild, pure, and strong. It is a voice that never sings false. You are never small when you listen to it.

And the colder outside the cosier within. There is experience enough of cold and storm to be had through the windows to satisfy a good many. Yet a man likes to find that the thermometer in his yard has

gone higher in summer and lower in winter than the thermometers of his neighbors. It makes his place adventurous, and he doubtless feels that he is an object of interest or sympathy.

One blessed state of winter is the quiet and late morning hours it imposes on our neighbors' fowls. They seldom harry us with visits after worms and seeds, but the cocks proclaim their waking at seasons when you do not wish to be apprised of it. It is one of the plagues of city life that you are thrown so close against disagreeable events. The authorities recognize but one nuisance,—that which offends the smell,—inasmuch as it argues offense to physical health. When a man boils bones or makes fertilizers, his neighbors stop the work, even going across the borders of his property to do it; but he is safe to offend the sight in any way he likes, and he can take strange liberties with our ears. The barking dog, the singing ass, the screeching parrot, the shrilling cat, the crowing cock, and the boy learning to play on the violin it is hard to surpass.

There was one bird who used to crow for about forty minutes, beginning at one o'clock in the morning. The wrath engendered by these solos kept me awake until three, and shortly after that hour he resumed for another half-hour or so. At five he began to crow in serious earnest for the day. And that pesky bird would go to bed while the sun was an hour high, in order to keep his voice fresh. His owner was one of the Seven Sleepers, and had never heard him; but by reason of an order from the health board and a police visit, I convinced him that the rest of us did, and the warbler was shut up after dark forthwith. He had escaped no end of stones, coal, and kindling that had been hurled at his voice during the night by people who went to bed at midnight and slept with their windows open.

Not all roosters are so offensive. I have heard the crow of one that was a long, wailing note like the howl of a dog. No two voices are alike, be it of men or birds; no two faces, no two minds, no two creatures, crystals, flowers, or petals. Nature's infi-

nite variety in unity! Somewhere, too, in the dawn, a cock called the hour in a trumpet-blast, definitely musical, thus:

and redeemed himself by that performance; for, of all futilities in nature, the harsh note of the domestic cock is most needless. There is an utter want of meaning in his tune. Inanimate things are sometimes more agreeable than he, and are less depraved than philosophers would have us think. I heard from our yard a farm-wagon grating and grinding along a street-car track on a frosty day, and the sound was in thirds and fifths, like two notes of a bugle.

How would it do, now, to remove the rooster's vocal cords, if he has any, and by dint of stirpiculture supplant the existing species by a crowless race? Surely, greater wonders than this have been accomplished without man's help; and I often wonder why the cock, being a low-roosting bird, reached easily by prowling foxes

and the like, did not long ago cease to advertise his whereabouts. Far back there was a reason for his noise, or he would n't have made it. It was evolved from the grunt or hiss of some wallowing lizard, his remotely great grandfather. Now that he has taken to living with us, let us encourage him to forget it. They say that evolution hardly explains the wonderful adaptability and economy of everything to its function. Why not? The most direct is the most economic; and evolution never goes roundabout. As soon as man got fairly planted on his hind legs, his tail shriveled and fell off.

Perhaps, though, the rooster does not want to evolve, does not want to be peaceable, does not want to lose his voice. He may take the same joy in using it that Reginald McGonigle takes in using his, or that the thugs do in New York when they lift theirs in blasphemy and foulness, proud of their ability to create attention, to shock where they cannot win respect. Well, there is a foundation rightness in this evil way of theirs. Old Adam is only the old

animal. It does not do to be too civilized. Extremes meet. The meeting-place of high culture and abject poverty are the asylum and the graveyard. Society tells us that we are helpless without civilization. Yes; it has made us so. Left alone from birth, if we did not starve early we should be "more destitute than a brute," especially as we are without any of the wings, claws, teeth, hair, feathers, and prehensile tails that put the eagle, the tiger, the monkey above us in the contest with nature. Do we not, then, as we get older and realize our loss, want to begin over again, and recover some of these brute advantages?

But, ah! which one of our acquired benefits are we willing to give up for more muscle, or for budding wings? The habit of house-building? The art of cookery? The daily paper? Hm! Something of our talk? Some of that vexing and variant fluid we call mind? Or the gift of imagination? Not the last, I think. That is the utmost of our evolution. It is the agency that lets us be other, greater, happier than we are. Life in the coun-

try might be as base as life in town if it were not for imagination. How much we owe to it, for how little we have in life, and death, that is tangible! A little while ago I heard a whistle — on a tug-boat in the river, most likely, for I hear it once a week at least; and whenever it sounds across the three miles of roofs, I drop my pen, spade, book, or what not, and am far away for some happy minutes. Sounds have, for me, the suggestive and reminiscent force that many find in odors; so, this whistle being in my memory the same I heard on the night boat that took me on my first visit to the Catskills, I have the thrill of that trip all over again. It was before the time of mountain railroads, big hotels, land speculations, and "No trespassing" signs. It was in October, and the haunted hills were lonely and all mine. The two days I spent there were spent afoot,— I walked and climbed sixty miles, — and they were a revel in color and the pathetic fragrance of fallen leaves. So the tug whistle dispels gloom, soothes overwrought nerves, obliterates meaner

sounds, and comes like a call blown by fays and fauns of the crimson hills. It fills the world with romance, for it is one of the few privileges of life in the city that there is this much to take one out of it.

And it is one of the sorrows of that same life that there is so little winter during the cold months. The snow that ought to *oe* used for sleighing, and for snow-balls to cast against the pot-hats and tiles of dignified citizens, is trampled and fouled and cleared away. Maybe when we have dismissed the horse from our service we shall be allowed to slide over the snowy streets in mechanically propelled sledges, and to take walks in parks and across vacant lots without sloshing through sweepings. There are few finer things than to be out of doors in wind and ugly weather. It satisfies our longing for fight. Thoreau says we must take long walks in storm and snow to keep our spirits up. "Deal with brute nature. Be cold and hungry and weary." Hard advice for us cits. I suppose my three-mile wade to the office on the day of the great blizzard would not have counted with

Thoreau; yet I protest I enjoyed it, and likewise the silence of the banked-up houses and blockaded streets for two days after. As to the yard, I do go there on winter evenings to see if any mistaken vegetable has stirred in the day's sunshine, or if there are any new McGonigle tracks in the snow. If the yard were ten miles long I should not try to go to the end of it, unless it were moonlight. Walking in the small hours over roads white with snow is one of the most peaceful yet exhilarating of experiences. As to cold, hunger, and tire, those states are excellent tonics, but poor company. Of course it is civilization that has made us cowardly, but there are few more wretched men than those, too proud to beg, who do not know at nightfall where they shall sleep or whether they shall eat.

The life of a yard writes itself large in new snow. It is occasionally clothes-line thieves, but mostly cats, and they wander about in our miniature wilderness, doubling on their tracks like the Israelites, as if to see how much ground to cover when there is not much to be covered. Sparrows, too,

and pigeons occasionally descend and leave their starry footprints on the white. Why is it that the sparrows, which in other seasons fight and travel in knots of three or four, or go about singly, appear so often in cold weather in flocks of a hundred? Is it that each is afraid the others will get something to eat, and he — the thief! — not be on hand to fight his share away from them? There is a fine of one hundred dollars in New York State for feeding an English sparrow. It is not needed.

Perhaps if we had more patience with this rascal of a bird, he would exhibit some respectable qualities. Anyway, he would show character. There is no chance to show that when one is being "shooed" out of a doorway. Every animal has an individuality as marked as that of a human being. Take cats. Take all of ours, if you like, and don't return them. But just take the case of cats. Their facial differences are considerable, when you look for them, and they often wear a deceptive countenance. Our Skimplejinks has a surprised and distant aspect, yet he gambols out to meet me in

the morning, like a dog, and runs up my trousers and coat to my shoulder. When a boot is shied toward him along the floor, he shoots straight into the air, like a bucking bronco, and as high. I know two kittens of the same family: one a seraphic-looking youngster with a pretty face, soft fur, and contemptible disposition; the other a vagrom brute with coarse gray hair streaked with black, a vulgar countenance, and marked courtesy and consideration. The tramp will accept a bone thankfully, and in teasing for more will pat you softly to draw your attention, while the seraph spits at everything before eating it, and once, when I offered my finger coated with gravy for him to clean, he bit it instead.

It is pleasant to find that most people esteem animals, even when they are hunters and gourmets and wearers of ornamented bonnets, and prefer them dead. Thoreau says he likes the brutes because they never talk nonsense, are never foolish, vain, pompous, or stupid. How about a parrot, an ostrich, a peacock, a horse, a hen? They make capital companions, when they con-

descend to associate with us, and are always interesting, for they never lay bare their thoughts to us. They are full of surprises. Why does the horse bolt furiously up the street and kill several of us if, for the twentieth time in a week, he sees a harmless piece of paper blown about the pave? And why does Arthur, our dog, wail and howl when I play the "Moonlight Sonata," though I play everything else as badly, or worse? Yet he comes to lie on my feet when I open the piano. And cats are as freakish as the weather. And there 's our canary. He will not bathe unless his tub is put into his cage while it is hanging. Set it on the table, and he refuses to wet his feet.

The first snow is always an event even in town. Winter has really come, and the almanac is right. Even those who do not regard the seasons or look at the sky have this fact forced on them: that something is under foot that was not there yesterday. A company of gentlemen, passing as the flakes began to fall, showed that they were not wholly out of touch with nature.

Said one, "I 'll be —— —— if it ain't snowing!"

Another replied, "What the —— do I care if it is snowing?" Then, in a tone of awakening interest, "Well, by ——, I 'll be —— —— if it ain't snowing!"

And the gentlemen continued their stroll.

Occasionally the plants show a surprising indifference to frost. A rosebud that appeared about the first of October was still awaiting encouragement from the sun in the middle of November. On Thanksgiving day I examined it again, but it had not budged. As a mild winter followed, I found no change in it. It remained a swollen, but never-bursting bullet of red. Finally I cut it and put it into a vase of water in the house, thinking that it might open in the warmth; but it slowly withered without opening a leaf or abating a jot of its toughness. After no less than six frosts the yarrow was as green as in August.

And we often go out to look at these survivals, that we may keep our minds green until the time of birds and buds comes around once more.

V

SPRING

THE last snow has fallen. The countryman is now embogged, and is losing temper and dollars because of the delays, difficulties, and damages he has imposed on himself by his cheap and miserable roads, and the city man is returning thanks that his yet more miserable street has ceased to be a place of navigation, and may now be forded, with rubbers. The first warm days take one out of doors: albeit in town they bring a forecast of the frightful August weeks to come, when men and horses fall at their work and have to be put on ice,—that is, the men do,—and babies die by hundreds in the tenements; die wretchedly within half a dozen miles of health and life; die because their parents are hopeless victims of the aggregation habit.

Now, we pull down the books and magazines on gardening; likewise the seeds which are to grow into vines that will climb all over the ward and star themselves with flowers as big as soup-plates, as brilliant as Solomon and society at the opera, but less sounding than either. We go out and poke the crooked spade into the ground, and fetch up a rich assortment of old boots, rubbers, bustles, oyster-cans, spikes, cinders, cobblestones, and other reminders that this is "improved property"—save the mark! This is the beginning of joy. The birds are coming back—to other people; the brooks are tinkling—just listen to our gutter; and the flowers will be here by and by; but ah! will they be according to those vivid colored catalogues of the seedsmen? Verily, I have a fear; for many benefits turn to blights. There is the manure that we paid the stable-keeper a dollar a load for, last fall, and look at what we are getting from it: insects, eggs, cocoons, wireworms, centipedes, all brought in with that enrichment. Sometimes it does n't seem worth while to reform, be-

cause the new evils that come with reformation appear so much worse than the old ones.

It all has to be looked up again, every spring: the way to put bulbs and seeds in, where, how deep, how many, in what soil; and even after the ground is prepared the dibble is sure to strike subterranean pans and flatirons, and the spade has to be resumed. Then, when it is late and mild enough to sow, the weeds are up in a lot of new places, and are stealthily encroaching on the space reserved for plants that would please us better. And if we are wise we do our weeding betimes. Completeness is rare in this industry. I have seen only one exhibition of it, and that was in the close of one of the English cathedrals, where two women were seated on the earth, patiently digging out of it, with steel dining-forks, every growing thing that was n't grass. The average man will admire that conduct — and refrain.

In moderation, the exercise of weeding encourages to good nature. It satisfies the human instinct of destruction, and, unlike

other forms of violence, it tends to good results — in us. If only we could weed humanity of its parasites, its vicious, its criminal elements as quickly and ruthlessly as we weed our gardens! We should have no army of 50,000 tramps to beg, bully, and steal a living out of us, no burglars, no drunken, corner-loafing, wife-beating, non-washing, swearing, insolent creatures. When we are better ourselves, we shall be less soft toward the irreclaimable, I fancy. If any escape the right parental and other formative influences, we shall exile them to barren lands, where they must hustle healthfully to live. The weeding of the human race cannot begin too soon, and the outlook for the rest of us will be brighter when criminals, by surgery if by no other means, can be prevented from longer begetting their kind, for it is a bad kind.

Like all reforms, weeding is easiest when earliest. You can thrust your fingers into the loose soil, and trace a root of witch-grass six inches under the surface and a foot in length, all spiked with yellow blades

that would have been up in another day or two; and as to the thousand other things, — plantain, thistles, and the like,— you have only to whistle to them, and out they come. But in August — well, that 's different. And weeds are so outrageously healthy. Or, do they merely seem so? The energy of vice and destructiveness always seems greater than that of virtue, probably because it is forced so disagreeably on our notice. Ugly dogs, ugly men, armies, beasts of prey, birds, fishes — what waste of ferocity and excess of effort in working their purpose! Yet I don't believe this tale that all is fear and suffering in the lesser world. Insects, at all events, do not suffer before they are eaten. Harshness is but a little part of nature, and benefits go with it. Though the storm, the flood, the thunderbolt, work harm, look on the fields, and see what kindness is in the sun and air and rain.

If we would let the weeds alone, or if we would be good to them and water them and cut away the corn and potatoes and geraniums when they encroached, who

knows what food for sight and stomach they might pay us with? For every plant was a weed once. Yet I more incline to fancy that the fed weed would sicken in disgust and shame at being thus taken for something desirable, and would peak and pine and shrink into the earth. The skunk-cabbage I bought of a sidewalk fakir simply refused to stay alive in the yard. He had hurt its feelings, maybe, by calling it an Egyptian water-lily. But with planting to do, we cannot stop to guess what the burdock and the ragweed might come to. We slash them down, and know that their brothers and sisters will be up next week. Still, this weeding takes us into the open, and makes the flowers so much the more precious in that they have been fought for. No doubt it is better that we should have nothing as we want it. That enables us to enjoy the wakeful emotion of surprise. It likewise incites us to effort, and the effortless man is stagnant, useless, decadent.

Did a man ever plant a thing — a seed or an idea — that he did not watch to see it come up? He must be a freak, or very

busy, if he did n't. He has made himself responsible for it; he has jibed his conduct to that of nature; he is a creator, in a way, and it hurts his pride a little if he can't raise beans. And it is a serene and pretty satisfaction to see things come out of the earth. It is as big a mystery as it was when man did no planting and did no thinking with his teacupful of brains, save of the wherewithal to be fed. As they rise out of the soil, these shoots are so alike for some days that we, with our ill-trained eyes, puzzle over their identity. What we decide to be a daisy is a plantain, and our lily in the other bed is an orchid. But they all stick loyally to their type, and the genista never turns out to be an apple-tree. Once we coddled a weed for a month, in the supposition that it was argeratum. It grew from the spot where we had one of these plants; so far as its leaves were concerned, it beat the argeratum, too, and did not have a horde of green, repellent grubs upon it, either.

Such a fresh rainbow-green as these new things wear! The eye never tires of

it. Or, if it wants awakening, let it look at the other colors for a minute, and it enjoys them; still it returns to the green with gladness. Be sorry for the man who takes no pleasure in color. Be twice as sorry for the woman. Pray for them both.

There are men, usually artists, who live by color as much as by bread. One such, whom I know, clung to his brass and china through a long time of almost starvation, and would not sell one of his studio treasures. He was a crank. Admirable institution, the crank — the only one of us who wears any picturesqueness in these days. It would be a happier world if everybody in it were a crank. A crank is a man who is more interested in something than his neighbors are. He thinks he knows more about it, and they hate him for that, and suspect him of designs. But if everybody were a crank, there would be no such sourness of thought toward him, because nobody would take a contract to hate the whole human race. Besides, there are not many bad cranks. I used to know a fellow who had a passionate interest in neck-

ties. If he could stand in front of you and study yours while you told him where you got it, and when, and why, and what you paid for it, it was all he asked. He grew in influence as he got older and had a political job. He is distinguished by the gorgeousness of his scarfs. None of us is self-centered: we are results of the past; and I have vainly tried to imagine what brought him about.

Scarfs suggest color, again, and that suggests art, and both recall me to the yard, where I have been setting out petunias, which are among the safest, steadiest, and most remunerative of all bloomers. But I wanted to say that what we call the artistic sense is often but the feeling for nature altered by generations of a society that seeks its self-protection at the expense of normal impulse. Once meshed in the house-staying habit, the victim, who has already lost the fineness of his sense of smell, the delicacy of his touch, and the savage's quickness of sight, resolves to keep his palate with high-seasoned appliances, and to distinguish colors, anyhow, with his

eyes. The cook is an artificer; but we forgive and even encourage him in his inventions. But what is the meaning of our rugs, our pottery, our pictures, our jewels, our morocco bindings, our implements of brass and silver, our patterned upholstery, our wall-papers, if not to afford color-equivalents of leaf, flower, water, rock, distance, and sunset? So we employ artists at many cunning trades, solely to keep our heads above the social swim by color-callings to our souls. A set of Chinese single-color porcelains makes, as near as may be, an epitome of the chromatics of the outer world. While they are on our shelves our eyes are not forlorn.

Winter is not an offense to me, even in town. They say it is kind of me not to object to it. There is a keen delight in fighting a north wind, in wading through snow, in feeling the tingle of blood that such a wrestle sends through one. And the beauty of snow, the silver of it, the shine of it, the stillness of it, the health of it, freezing and smothering the evil fraternity of microbes — these are not to be gain-

said. But with the peep of spring we begin to be willing to see green. There is a lot of life in winter, especially in ourselves; but life without vegetation is not complete. Green is the assurance of life. So we watch for the coming of the grasses, of the clover, hop-clover, wild clover, chickweed, pigweed, purslane, plantain-rod, English plantain, dandelion, smartweed, shepherd's-purse, oxalis, mallow, daisy, sorrel, camomile, wild parsnip, ragweed, butter-and-eggs, thistle, aster, yellow-dock,— all of which are indigenous to our yard,— while we keep an eye on the moss, algæ, and fungi, and rejoice to see their increase. The foregoing list is not complete: it is merely recalled. When I looked first at the yard I saw nothing but grass. The eye sees what it wants or expects, or is used to see. After a time I noticed clover. I am not sure that I discovered the abundance of chickweed until the canary-bird needed some. Now I find that every yard is a botanical garden of unguessed variety and extent. Even some yards in that Sahara they call New York — yards

with a dozen spears of vegetation — have at least two or three forms of plant life.

There is one lack in city farming, however, and that is birds. The chattering, quarreling English sparrow, who has driven American birds away, infests us, of course; but the robins, the bluebirds, yellow-birds, and orioles, that I used to see in town in my youth — they are gone: hidden in the country, some; sacrificed for women's hats, others. Once I did hear a robin in a tree a few rods away, and an unknown bird was singing in our hearing at another time. There is a plenty of songsters in the park, and I often run out there on my wheel to hear them. The park is only a mile away, yet almost never does one of these birds alight in our preserve.

The night-hawk is our only visitor who is truly wild, and he has never come to earth in my sight. He appears in May, and his harsh squawking is heard often on consecutive evenings until fall. As he arrives in the twilight it is hard to get a peep at him; but one afternoon he began to cry before sunset, and it was easy to place him

then. His flight is short and jerky as compared with that of the great hawk. From an elevation of perhaps three hundred feet he twice swooped rapidly to within a hundred feet of ground. His squawk must have frightened his prey, if he saw any. On another evening he came flying from the southwest, hurriedly passing not more than sixty or eighty feet overhead. Three of these hawks came over in company at another time, and their shrilling was far more agreeable to me than the yell of "Clams! Soft-shell clams!" on the next street. But many will not believe it. His harsh and threatening note is a gratefully wild one in the dry, warm town. Though it sounds but a few rods up in the air, you see nothing with straining of your eyes; so there is something elfish and uncanny as well as exhilarating in this shriek from a viewless source.

If only a crow would come around once in a while and sing for us, the bricks and noise would be forgotten, though not forgiven, and the country would be near.

Never having crops to lose,—for that matter, knowing that he eats more insects than corn,—the caw of the crow is music to me. It is strong, calm, and confident—a voice of nature. So, I take it, is the voice of Reginald McGonigle, who may be regarded as the crow of this neighborhood, since he despoils yards at his pleasure.

Did I omit the pigeons? Still, they are not wild. Look at a flight of them: human-like creatures, following each other without question as to the straight, sensible, profitable way. On nearly every morning they are to be seen rising from a stable roof on another street: more than a score of them. They fly over the roofs at a height of sixty to a hundred feet, circling in a ring fifty yards in diameter. After going perhaps twenty times from right to left, a few will spring higher into the air, the rest following, as in "snap the whip," and reverse the motion, so that the flight goes from left to right. Do they get dizzy like green waltzers or romping children? After wheeling for a time in the new direction they drop to the roofs, as by general con-

sent, occasionally resuming the exercise later. What are they doing? They do not seem to be chasing any luckier one of their number with a crust in his beak, though at times there is a moment of livelier rush, as if hoping to overtake something. It seems rather a sport. They play circus, or follow-my-leader. They are literally skylarking, except for the song.

When spring comes in town the arrival is quick, but especially insidious. You quarrel with your overcoat, and your graceless pot-hat makes your brow sweat. Then you notice that it is warm, and you look to the earth to prove it. Yes, the grass is an inch out of the ground, yet only the day before yesterday you noticed the yard narrowly, and there was no new green, only the dusty green of the rhododendron leaves and the buds it has been cherishing since fall; the gray green of the honeysuckle; the streaks of old green in the grass, where it was cheated by a midwinter spell of October weather into coming out, then brutally nipped; and the dull stalks of the roses with their leaf-buds in the axils of

old stems that fell off at a touch in December. The iris, though its older leaves are drooped and faded, keeps its inner and shorter stalks firm and summery-looking until the very last of the snowy season.

In our coast towns the awakening of the year is heralded by a chorus of sneezes and coughs; for the air is charged with moisture, making it seem warmer than it is, and men steal into chambers to shed their flannels and exchange them for gauze, avoiding publicity and confession of this swap to escape a scolding. Then they go out, and the mercury drops twenty degrees unannounced, and they go back home and have things the matter with their lungs and other interior fittings. At least they do if they live up to the expectations of those elderly female relatives who gather at the bedside and say, "I told you so." Taking no joy in hot and scratchy flannel, some of them, among whom I humbly number myself, wear none of it, and have only the usual number of colds. When it is chilly one can put on an overcoat. Doubtless if we would breathe deeply and

use our lungs as we should, a change in temperature or atmospheric condition would not bother us. A few people think it a solemn duty to acquire fevers, boils, bad blood, and other incorrect habits in the spring; and this class of the self-deluded afflict themselves with bitter herbs and nauseous stews, which are known as "spring medicine." As if there could be a spring medicine! The advertising quack vends gallons of nostrums on the strength of an inherited faith. There are no spring disorders, any more than there are autumn disorders, or a "line storm," or a devil, or a will-o'-the-wisp.

It is a subtle and wondrous change that the trees make in the few first days of leafage. Red is a common color for the newest foliage, and in certain of the oaks it is almost as strong a red as you find in October. Does this serve any protective purpose against insects or browsing animals? Hardly. It is that the sunlight has not had time to kindle the chlorophyl.

Rains are to be looked for now; and after a long, hard one I notice that the

shade-maples in the street are drooping, as if water-soaked or chilled. Does the lack of light sadden them? The effect is somewhat lasting, for they do not brighten promptly when the sun returns. But how the fall of water inspirits the algæ! Look for them on the north side of tree-trunks after rain. Small boys who want to trail grizzlies and red men through the woods may begin their education in forestry in our yards and streets.

Earth is deceptive — at least the mixed kind on our block is so. It looks as if it would be an easy thing to spade up the whole yard in a day; but as it is impossible to run a blade full depth in less than three tries, the job becomes appalling before even the borders are dug over. We gather up the cobbles and coal-hods that are exhumed in this industry, and after dark cast them into a hollow across the way, where they and the bed-springs are sure to become springs of profanity in the man who is going to build there. (And serve him right for shutting out our view!) Once the digging promised to be interest-

ing, for it looked as if we had discovered moles; but on penetrating their supposed tunnel, it was found to be caused by the soil working out under the fence into the carpenter's yard, which is a foot or so lower than ours. But there is some instinct in us, dating back to more-times-great-grandfathers than we would try to enumerate, that bids us dig, and there is a natural conscience that approves when we have put in and covered the seeds. The world is going to be richer for our day's work, and when we come in with lame back and trembling hands, marveling that physical labor should be so hard to the unaccustomed, we feel a glow of pride, and an assurance that we have earned sleep and a dinner. Better, we have earned health. We have no pessimism where green things are and people dig for their dinners. Pessimism is worse than tragedy: it is a tragedy of the soul; the attribute of a tired-out race. When we keep in touch with nature we share her splendid life.

On the day in early March when, for the first time in the year, I saunter forth without an overcoat, with the youngsters in

tow, likewise without top-coats, to their relief and glee, we find the *Scleranthus annuus* brightening. What a name to roll under the tongue, and what nonsense to give it to such a little, harmless plant! Also we find springing grass in warm corners, a few feet from old snowdrifts partly glaciated to a depth of three or four feet. But the find of the day is a caterpillar moving stiffly over an old newspaper. Where was he quartered all winter? And only last night there was a tight freeze. Clarence and Harold carry this creature into the house and put him under a tumbler, as partial offset for the loss of the turtle. The second turtle they brought from New Jersey would come into the house in the fall whenever a door was opened, instead of burying himself as he would have done if he had never learned that houses were warm. We wrapped him in carpets, put him into a box, and he went to sleep; but during some zero weather his slumber merged into the long one. His predecessor was kept in a warm cellar, and did not hibernate. He did worse — he died.

On the night of this same March day

we are able to see the eclipse of the moon from our yard as well as if we had been in Walden.

With the graying and thinning of our hair we have less warmth under it, they say, and begin to live in the past — in that period when we amounted to something, or thought we did. And in this season of the year one childish episode returns to me: May Day. The good old custom, set by the Druids, of rambling off to field or grove on the first of May, and making a show of gathering flowers that usually were not there, was as general in Boston in my early years as that of shooting gunpowder and each other on the Fourth of July among the boys of all our towns to-day. School was dismissed, and the children put on wreaths of flowers, and traveled about in groups, playing games or picnicking with their teachers or other elders among the Cambridge elms, the Middlesex fells, and the Newton hills. As there were few florists in those days and little pocket-money among the juvenile Puritans, their wreaths were made of paper; and sheets of colored

tissue, from which these garnitures were cut, were offered in the shops at a cent apiece, as freely as toys at Christmas. These sheets the maternal hand wrought into marvelous roses, camelias, and other blossoms that had no likeness to anything on earth; but there was color, and the effect was innocent and pretty. Now and then one heard of dances about the May-pole, and the garlands were of paper, too. The only garlands I ever saw were made of that. Yet, from the way the poets used to talk about them, you might suppose that flowers grew that way on every bush. The sweet old day is gone. Perhaps Decoration Day takes the place of it. It was not very seasonable, anyway; and a boy with a wreath of flowers, upturned collar, and red nose did not look entirely spring-like. If the true allegory of New England's May is ever painted, she will be represented in a sealskin sack and a pair of overshoes, with hothouse roses in her hand.

VI

SUMMER

SUMMER is the time when the yard looks best and feels worst — meaning that the human creatures who maintain it are least at ease; for we have about four months in the year when the temperature is infernal. Those who can, and are wise, fly to the hills. Those who are poor and can't, or won't, stay among the baking bricks and blistering asphalt, and toil and drink and grumble and die. And it is not every one who can show a yard with fifty varieties of plant in bloom at once to mitigate the temperature. For, really, it seems a shade less hot when you can smell roses through the windows, and when the lusciousness of honeysuckle pervades the steaming, stagnant air. In the morning, when people are gasping at the humidity,

and the heat is rippling up from the flagstones and out from the house-fronts, we have only to go to the back windows and look down into the lush greenery to feel as if there were less perspiration. In New York a yard, save just enough of one for clothes to dry and cats to sing in, is an exception. I would rather rent this two-story affair with a few feet of nature added, than live in Fifth Avenue and have no grass to put my feet on.

And there goes a statement that will be doubted, because there are so many who believe that everybody wants to be rich. Comfortable, free from anxiety, yes. Rich, no. The joys of wealth have been extolled openly in converse, covertly in writing. Few have published the joys of poverty — not the pretty sentiment of song and picture, the roses and love and bread and cheese and lowly cottage and all that, but the real enjoyment of it. Think of its irresponsibility, of its freedom from duns, for nobody will trust you; of the security from invitation to drunken dinners, insipid calls, pretentious receptions, solemn func-

tions, and fussy teas; of the liberty to do nearly as you like, and go where you please, and enlarge upon Mrs. Grundy as roundly in words as you are sure to do in thought. Poverty throws a man on himself, and he is happiest and best when he is making the most of himself. His pleasures, being simple and intellectual, are lasting. He is relieved of a lot of worry about yachts, starch, balls, dresses, precedence, and fluff; and he does n't have insomnia because the papers failed to get his name "among those present" at the dinner to Lord de Livrus. There is a man who struggled for years to get into the set that calls itself society and strangely overweens itself because Jenkins hangs on its skirts and reports its breathings in the public prints. Ever since he got in he has been wondering why he did it. We are all rainbow-chasers. The pains of poverty, where they occur, depend on the width of the gap between a victim's material aspirations and his possessions. The poorest people I know are bankers and speculators with yearly incomes of $50,000 or so, and two

houses to keep. The chief blessing of poverty is that other folks don't ask you to help them to live.

Truly, the opulence of gold may comfort one, but it cannot be a substitute for the wealth of color in our yard. No, it is not a vain statement. Reason it out for yourself: limitless gold, in bareness and dullness and squalor; or next to none of it, and brightness and gaiety and liberty and action?

This is when we reap that which we have sown in the spring. We have coddled it through the frosts, and now we glean it for dinner and the neighbors, and some sprays and blossoms for the always eager children of the tenements. Reginald McGonigle comes over the fence and helps himself, though he does n't care much about flowers. Few good things come without work,— it is only the bad things that do that,— and my wife often puts in a morning when I am at the shop, and we labor together for an hour after I come home in the evening. Insects take most of our time, but there are dead leaves to

pinch off, earth to stir, vines to train, enthusiastic bushes to trim, weeds to pull, grass to cut, cats to shoo away, and the whole place to water. If time is worth money, it is cheaper to buy flowers at the shops; but it is the raising of them that makes the best fun. Remit your care, even for a few days, and the place becomes "a sight."

It is surprising that weeds want so much room. Tear them up, and you see much bare earth under and about them. They not only steal the nutriment from the flowers, but try to monopolize the sunshine. The thrifty weed is like the thrifty man, and even the thrifty mind; yet no: for the best mind is one-sided, and does not get in the way of lesser ones. They will have it that we ought to develop our minds generally as well as specifically. A mind evenly grown is prettier to look at, like the box-trees in old-fashioned gardens after the gardener has trimmed them; but shapeliness is not enough: strength and reliability are more.

The mind of a Newton, a Darwin, an

Edison may, after all, be big in one department, and in others shrunken from disuse. One may even have a mind like a Turner or — no, I will not mention the musician's name — that would show itself on the outside of the head by one big bump in a desert of depression. And here is Got, dean of the Comédie Française, claiming that in his calling people get on best without minds. Bother it all! The worst of thought in this nineteenth century is that you don't know what to think. My Emerson and Bacon, even my Burroughs and Thoreau, shall suggest nothing to me to-day. I will leave my brains in the house, and sit among the petunias and sweet-peas. For nature, even a yardful of it, makes health in her communicant. Get away from self-consciousness. Think not of your mind nor of your fate. Why be always thinking on your end? as graveyard literature hath it. We are here to live, not to die. Continue the good work that those might have done who are gone. So shall you be prepared to die.

There may be matters that people hold

more different minds about than gardening, but I doubt it. The study of it from magazines and floriculturists is an experience to blister the understanding and destroy confidence in man. I bought some roses.

"Don't you water 'em much," said the man who sold them to me; "for if you do you are sure to rot them. They 'll send their roots down and get all the water they want."

The man was so confident he aroused my suspicions, so I went to a magazine to see if he knew his business. He did n't; for the periodical put stress on watering, and said that roses could not do without it. They needed sun. Then I tried another magazine. It had nothing to say about water or lime or sun, but it insisted on very rich earth, and on letting the bushes alone after they were set out. Then I tackled a gardener, and he said: "Roses? Well, they 're kind of unsatisfactory; have so many diseases and bugs; but if you 'll dust them with tobacco and use a sandy soil and give them manure-water and let them have a drink when they look thirsty, and stir the earth up

around them every little while, they will generally bloom, sometimes."

And then I looked up the boss of a large flower-shop and asked him, and he said: "Roses will live out and bloom all the time in any kind of a soil, and it does n't make any difference whether they have light or shade."

Now, then, what are you going to do about it? I 'm going to keep on treating mine as I treat the rest of the plants: weed them, shower them at evening, and pick the worms off. Then if they won't bloom they can make way for something that will. I may mention that the only roses that gave us any satisfaction were the cheap, common kinds that were well grown before we bought them. The dwarfs, so pretty in the catalogues, were a mean and measly lot, producing perhaps one flower apiece; and the crimson rambler that was to cover our fence with pounds of bloom, promptly rambled down into the earth and stayed there, like our California violets that were to bear flowers something less large than saucers.

But if roses do not always behave in town as you expect them to, there are other flowers that surpass expectation. The fleur-de-lis (flower of Louis — the "royal lily" of France, which is not a lily, and belongs to us as much as to Europe) is one of those steady, reliable growths that nobody should be without. We put ours into a clump, and as they have grown they have matted together, so that for a month we have a gorgeous array of white, yellow, blue, and purple flowers, faintly fragrant and greatly satisfying. Insects do not make too much havoc with them, and they almost never touch the blooms.

Then there are morning-glories that sow themselves like weeds, and petunias that flower all summer, ditto geraniums, and the sunny nasturtium with its variants of lemon, gold, orange, scarlet, red, and crimson, the modest yet showy portulaca, and sundry others. But you do not have to buy anything. Raise wild flowers. Every vacant lot has them, and the suburbs are gay with dozens of species all the way from April to snow-time. I have never been

without them since we occupied our present quarters, and there are few things to beat our golden-rod, daisies, violets, buttercups, and dandelions. We have a wild corner where these and other plants thrive among ferns and mosses, and it is the prettiest and most reliable part of the yard.

The golden-rod was sown by accident. It was supposed to be something choice, and we watched and watered and weeded it. After it was a foot or so out of ground the leaves began to look oddly familiar. It was perhaps two feet tall before we recognized it fairly as the roadside weed and breeder of hay-fever, in other people; but it was then so green and fair that we could not bear to tear it up. We took up only a root or so to set nearer to the house, and in September we had two bouquets of yellow as pretty as one would wish to see. Next year the plants had increased the number of their shoots, ran to a height of five feet, and bloomed copiously. Last year they were six feet high, and their flower-spikes were majestic.

So with our "jimson-weed." It should

be explained, for the enlightenment of the very few who don't know, that the name is a corruption of Jamestown weed, as the plant spread itself liberally over the site of Jamestown, Virginia, after that town had been burned in 1676, as the only way to keep the scampish and dunderheaded Berkeley out of the place. How this particular weed got into our premises nobody knows; but without warning or planting it just came up and grew. There is none other within a thousand feet of us, I should say; the wind certainly did not carry the seeds, and I should not suppose that birds would, either, for they are poison — at least to featherless bipeds. And being there, I made the best of it, and before cool weather set in it had become an exhibition. But I find that others have discovered it as a flower, for a seedsman's catalogue, lately arrived, sets forth the merits of *Datura Stramonium*, which is an alias for the humble jimson. It likewise rejoices in the name of thorn-apple in some localities.

"Hello! You 've got a castor-oil plant

back there, have n't you?" exclaimed one visitor, as he entered our reservation; and he would n't believe it, for a while, when I told him it was jimson. That was after several weeks of feeding and watering and stirring of the earth about its roots. Having made a cultivated plant of it, it rewarded us by inviting in a lot of insects and blooming profusely. It has a regal and tropical look, with its sleek stem and huge leaves; and its long lavender trumpets, streaked with purple and delicately perfumed, are as fine as if the plant were expensive. The flowers last but a day or so, then droop. We find them on the day after blooming collapsed and depending from the long, thread-like pistil at the base of which the nutty-looking fruit is forming. Its pet pest is a tiny black beetle that peppers the leaves with holes. The stramonium would be acknowledged as a horticultural masterpiece if only it would get rid of its smell — the sickish, soupy odor that arises whenever it is jostled. But we put up with evil smells from other plants — the lantana, for example.

No; the objection to stramonium, as to all other wild flowers, lies in its cheapness. The vacant lots are full of it, and it is called a weed; so that settles it.

Nothing better than the jimson illustrates the necessity a plant is under of blooming when you pick its wilted flowers, and refuse to let it go to fruit. A plant has a maternal desire for offspring, and when thwarted it constantly renews its attempt to make seed. The flower is simply a means to an end. Its odor and color draw the insect who, in his search for food, unconsciously fertilizes it; and conception occurs as soon as the pollen of one flower is dusted on the pistil of the next by the legs or wings of the moth or bee. Some plants have not vitality enough to form a second crop of blossoms when the first has been picked; but others crack along all summer, blooming prodigiously. Such others are the petunias, geraniums, phlox, pansies, and oxalis. Indeed, almost all plants, except those of the rose and lily tribe, will put forth a second series of flowers if the first is clipped. I made

a moth-mullein bloom three times in a few weeks after transplanting it from a vacant lot, by cutting off its seed-pods; and the balsams were long kept in flower by the same treatment. That is one of the charms of the garden: the flowers give back more than you take away.

And there are the yarrows, pink and white, and their humbler cousin the camomile. Cultivate a yarrow. No prettier plant grows. But let it have its own wild way so far as you can. So with the camomile, which is an honest as well as a free and modest plant, and if it has over-much attention it will stunt and sicken. The camomile that comes out of dusty lots, generously hiding bricks and old bottles, is among the soundest and largest. It is but one of the half-noticed and wholly misprized beneficences that the town does not deserve. Coddle the plant, shade it, manure it, and you will have done what the flatterer does to a man from whom he wants some favor; it will droop away from you and withdraw painfully from the unwelcome service. Sensitive, sensible

plant! Left to itself, it may heighten its beauty or take on strangeness. Hamilton Gibson said that he once found a head of yarrow blossoms that was surrounded with rays like a daisy or a camomile. The foliage of yarrow and camomile are so alike that it is easy to mistake the one for the other; but pinch a leaf of each to extract the smell, and the difference is plain: the camomile is rank and herby, the yarrow spicy and nutty. The flowers are widely different, and the camomile is often called a daisy by city folks because it is yellow with white rays.

What a wonder it is that people who like flowers do not make more of the wild ones! Take the dandelion, noblest of the early blooms, and the only fearless one, and what might not be made of it? Fancy a window full of these golden disks in winter! I chose one of these plants out of half a hundred in our yard one spring, and made an aristocrat of it for a month, not taking it from its place, but merely giving it extra attention. It had manure-water now and then, it was sprinkled every even-

ing, broken and faded leaves were picked off, and an effort was made to keep down the florescence. Our dog, Arthur, and even Skimplejinks, the cat, interfered to some degree with the experiment; but even after many leaves and blossoms had been torn off, the plant formed a heavy mat of green, and the flower-heads, though not large, were numerous. It was not so successful a dandelion — absurd corruption of *dent de lion* — as one can often find by the wayside, but it was the best in our yard. There was one that bore twenty-five heads of flowers at a time, yet the plant was so small I could cover it with my hand. Dandelion roots are so long that they do not take kindly to the restraints of civilization. I put a small one into a pot about six inches deep, which I plunged in one of the beds. Through the hole in the bottom the roots cast many threads that had to be torn when it was taken up for winter housing, but the plant bloomed in captivity.

Speaking of cultivated plants, I brought in a cinquefoil from the vacant lot across

the way, potted it, and sank it in a bed to see if cultivation would improve it. I believe it did, a little. On taking it up, I was surprised to find the interior of the pot lined with tough pale-brown paper, so that when the plant was pulled out it brought this paper with it, a perfect cast of the pot. I was sure I had put nothing into it but earth, and a chip of brick to secure drainage, and this phenomenon puzzled me. I tore up the wrapping and discovered that it was connected by many threads with the roots of the plant. The mystery was solved: the paper was a sheet of rootlets. The pot was small, and so, in their effort to get out and drink, the rootlets had gone up and down the inner side, weaving a fine sheath for the bit of earth in which the cinquefoil had been set. It is an odd fact that some domesticated plants do not flower until they are pot-bound.

Not all wild flowers submit to care. They get into wrong soils and situations, and plants do not survive misfits so well as men. Few of us are where or what we want to be, and the world is full of round

holes with square human pegs in them. If a plant is not rightly placed, it simply dies and gets out of its trouble. Yet sometimes, when we think it dead, it is only invalided and is biding its time. It is a plant that loves sand and sun, and has got into a shaded piece of muck; or it wants shade and repose, and its foothold is hot and windy: but a few days of drought or rain, or warmth or coolness, will revive the forlorn little thing, and it pops back into daylight once more, puzzled, maybe, but robust and glad.

And how seldom has a misplaced man an experience like this! Even our yard is not a hermitage. If only the jangle of the door-bell did not penetrate to this seclusion of phlox and petunias! It is the world's demand to be let in to play the spy and gossip. It is the analogue of the Westerner who, finding a cabin in the wilderness with curtains drawn, reached through the window and brushed them aside, inquiring, "What 's going on here so darned private?" In a sense it reminds us of an alleged and supposititious

duty that we owe to the world; something too much of our debt to the world, and of our claims upon it; something too much of dragooning into the sciolistic socialism of the time — a blind reaching for more and mere animal comforts. A man's duty is mainly to himself. If he absolve the world from its part in the conventional arrangement, the world must do the like for him, even though, in loving nature more than man, one resigns some of his humanity, and shapes his destiny to larger, rougher, more unsocial ends than those of his fellows. Mountains become more than people to him, so he goes back to primal strength and eke to savagery.

We are afraid of unpopularity — shockingly afraid. We would rather be wrong than unusual. Unconventionality is a greater offense than sin. Litter the street with rubbish, breed contagion in the neighborhood, be a prize-fighter or an alderman, swindle your friend in a stock deal, and the law will not trouble you; but cut the two buttons from the back of your coat, let your hair grow, wear sandals,

bring your favorite hippopotamus into the house, leave off a crinoline or bustle when those horrors are rife, and whew! the gabble and the scolding! The laws laid down by Mrs. Grundy are the most stringent of all laws. Shall we ever wake up and do our own thinking? Let loose a Luther, or Bellamy, or Marx, and what a coil! Because they tell something that the others have not told. How afraid we have been of science, because its facts disagree with the whimsies we have been expecting it to prove! We ought to love a revolutionist, even one of destructive theories, because he puts life enough into us to make us complain, at all events.

Look at the superstitions that have laid hold on us — superstitions about wealth and society, and other superstitions about equality; superstitions about secret fraternities and spring medicine, equinoctial storms and amber beads, goose-bones, Bhagavat Gitas, unlucky Fridays, and night air. Superstition is a roundabout process of false reasoning; and it is harder to reason falsely than right; yet see how we keep on

doing it. Let one man swear that thirteen is an unlucky number, and you will have to disprove it thirteen times to prevent an epidemic of belief. It all comes through fear, and dates back to the time when fear was a proper and self-preservative condition among men. It kept them at a safe distance from each other, and from mososaurs and mastodons. Most people have to be afraid of something in order to keep their moral balance. Among the roughs this fetish is the police, among the better sort it is law, government, and governors; and when you meet people who think disrespectful things of honorable bar-keepers and the equator, you will find them cringing before an Idea: their own Idea, too. As to —

Ah, I see what 's the matter. The thermometer in my yard marks 98° in the shade, and the humidity is about 80. States of mind are likely to happen in a city summer. I will get out the hose and spray the grass. Its brightening color will bring up visions of the country.

Since the yard has been watered regu-

larly toadstools have increased in number. There are at least two varieties, and on some days the ground is dotted with them. The beds that contain the heavier plants, which cast deep shadows, are rife with *crucibulum vulgare*, the oddest fungus that grows. At first it was mistaken for the seed-cup of the portulaca, left from last year, for it is dry and rusty-looking; but the appearance of new ones, and their change from balls to bowls, did away with that notion. The cup is one third to one half an inch in diameter, and holds what appear to be black seeds. They are not seeds, however, but spore-cases, lightly held to the cup by white threads, and quite like eggs in a nest.

These fungi and oddities always make us look into them. Flax-blooms and their like are monotonously perfect — classic. The classic is the perfection of the regular. The picturesque, on the contrary, is delight in the irregular. Ragged vegetation is picturesque; so are the woods; so are orchids and cacti. Gardens are introductions of the classic into nature — the hu-

manizing of nature. It depends on the humanizer whether the process is quietly submitted to or not. But I am glad to see that parks and gardens are no longer "slicked up" as they used to be. Vain man has discovered that nature can do some things well. For two thousand years we have been influenced in matters of form by the Greeks. The Greeks are a little too perfect for some moods. Their work has not enough in reserve. It is like Mozart's music, all light and no shade. Let us have some rudenesses and weaknesses. Let us be grandly and gloomily Gothic, once in a while.

Yet the Parthenon has subtle and intentional irregularities. There is not a line in it which is mathematically straight. Its architects must have studied the charm of diversity and taken lessons from the flowers and trees. Nothing exactly conforms to rule, and sometimes rule is set at naught. For instance, I have seen this summer a double wild cherry—two stones and one stem—a pear growing absolutely upright, and flowers that freaked unaccountably in

shape and color. Such things emphasize a general regularity, yet we are pleased with the latent chance of divergence: it gives latitude. Indeed, in all forms and expressions of worth and beauty we swerve from our original aim and bend toward its opposite. Painting that has no temper of breadth, tone, sobriety,— repellent things to the new eye,— how sugary, thin, and pretty-pretty it is! In music we would tire of major harmonies forever, and want a season of minor, which is nearer to discord,—yes, and even a diminished chord and discord itself for contrast's sake. We do not take our colors in prismatic purity; we do not want our sculpture, bronze, and porcelains in weak, smooth forms. The palate objects to pure sugar, and will have a hint of acid or of bitter. Man will not be led wholly by his senses, nor suffer himself to be confined by their experience. Especially in the outer world should he be willing to merge his prejudice, for when he is fairly and sympathetically in the heart of nature he does not find its spirit reserved and distant, as one philosopher declares it

to be, but close and lovable and as near frank as it can be in silence. Its magnificences are human.

Say, rather, our humanity still finds itself a brother to it. Carlyle and some others who are interested only in men complain if one writes of scenery: as if Thoreau's rhapsodies and Burroughs's studies and Blackmore's descriptions were not as well worth the effort as Carlyle's dyspeptic grumbles at the very fellows who entertain him. The vanity of men in claiming to be all! As if there would be no bears or turtles to enjoy the world if man were not on hand to oversee them! Man's study is himself? Well, perhaps; but how can he know himself if he fails to know that grander, finer, more enduring creation that has spawned him on this drifting globule of matter? In nature we touch life. The world's—creation's—vital juices course in every sapling. In the animals who have shaken their roots loose and gambol among the fields those juices are stronger than among those who have walled and shedded themselves away from the

earth, air, and light,—men and barnacles,—and delivered themselves to abstractions. The sun! Light! Heat! Let us go to the source. Let us be Parsees. Be distant with men, once in a while, for sanity's sake. Let their tumult come to you softened, as their Sunday bells sound across the fields. Then they, too, will seem to fit into the scheme of things, which is all beauty, except where man has made it otherwise.

And I cannot think our yard is otherwise in its dress of flowers this summer.

VII

AUTUMN

OF all seasons in town, autumn is most irksome mentally. Summer causes more profanity and drink, but autumn is the time when people want to be out of doors. Man takes an incurable interest in himself. Let him get up a fair to show what he can do, and how he runs to see it! The greater fair of nature — he has n't always time for that. Except in autumn. And there never was so rank a citizen that he did not look at the fall color and exult in it. Even the English visitor who said that our October woods were "rawther tawdry, ye know," did us the honor to look at them. With the chilling of the nights and the passing of the flowers, the yard is left partly to take care of itself. Some of the plants, being annuals, in seed,

or past the time of it and promising no more, have been pulled up; a few have been cut down; some have been mulched; and the place no longer wears the tropic look of summer. In the shortening afternoons I shower the grass with a hose, and keep that bright; but the best of the flower-time is passing. So I steal away on my bicycle, and run through the parks and out on Long Island, and on the roads that overlook the Hudson; for the color of the garden now is as nothing to the color that fills the woods. There are yellow, orange, scarlet, crimson, purple, brown, green, sometimes confusing, always gorgeous, triumphant, joyous, exhilarating. There are no tapestries, no Oriental rugs, no Chinese porcelains, no silks from the East, like unto these leaves of beech, birch, poplar, maple, sumac, oak, ampelopsis, and woodbine. The poplar is nearly at the top of the gamut with its pale yellow, the oak at the bottom with its crimson bronze mottled by dark green; but the chief factor in the celebration, the carnival that precedes the winter rest, is the maple, most gorgeous

thing that grows, with every shade of red and yellow known to the painter in its leaves, and the sun turning them into gems and stained-glass windows. Why is it that with our commercial determination we have never made merchandise of this splendor? Leaves that have been waxed and ironed keep their color for a long time, and one would suppose that a bouquet of them would sell in the highways as readily as roses. I gladly note that they are beginning to sell daisies and golden-rod in town, and a girl in Nantucket picked up $150 in a summer by making up books of pressed wild-flowers of that windy, ocean-pounded moorland.

With a lessening in the humidity that is such a cause of suffering in summer, the temper of the populace improves. You hear less squalling and slapping when you pass the tenements (may the man be forgiven who invented those abominations!), and there are not so many tired eyes and lagging steps in the streets. Man was not born to be an amphibian. He prefers his air and water separate. Happy, ye

dwellers amid the hills, who know not the sweltering August fogs and hazes of the shore!

Autumn color is obviously a result of ripening. You find it without frost. In October the maples are often as brilliant in Florida as they are in Maine, and the contrast they make with the dark green of the palms and the lush green of the undergrowth is startling. We need pure air, however, for this color; and the town is gray and brown, as it always is, the shade-trees merely withering. The west- and east-side streets of New York are the ugliest places in all the earth. Every spear of grass, every tree, has been carefully rooted up, that brawling humanity may have nothing green in its eye and its way; and if in better streets you find a row of starveling maples, they show no gaiety in these days. Yet just across the river the noble Palisades are sheeted in reds and yellows that fruit in the sun resplendently. And even in our yard the evil air steals in and rusts the leaves where they should glow. The blossoms of the gourd no

longer emit their refined musky odor in the morning, but the fruit makes spots of gorgeous orange against the dulling leaves. Chrysanthemums and cosmos are coming to flower, and dandelions are putting up a second crop. The little sheep-sorrel that is red in the spring is likewise red in the fall, and is one of the few plants that have vivacity in town. Certain of the lesser things have vanished. The gradual but utter disappearance of many plants after flowering is one of the oddest and most unaccountable things in nature. There is the little *Scleranthus annuus*, for example: where does it go?

I have mentioned our toads. They were brought home from the suburbs in a botany-box while young — so young they could have been put into a walnut-shell. Their fare of insects has been so plentiful that they have waxed fat, the first inhabitant having taken on almost unseemly proportions. The ability of the fellow to disappear is surprising. You beat about the bush, as it were, and turn the leaves, but he never shows up until he is good and ready, when

he will pop out from vacancy under your very nose. Probably he buries himself at the first frost. One of our earlier and experimental batches of toads never appeared again after their first winter. I fear they suffered in the early spading of the flower-beds, either being jammed deep, beyond hope of resurrection, or cut in twain by the ignorant implement.

Toads are not pretty, but they are useful in eating insects, and there is no harm in them. The bigger toad is active about nightfall, but he hops into the shade if he sees me coming. When I take him up he discharges water and tries to get away, ducking and flinching every time I stroke his head. One hot afternoon I discovered him in a dense growth of sweet alyssum by his croak, a short, faint hen-like note several times repeated. When one of the children took him up he croaked in his hands. Later in the season he became more vocal. This toad appeared to get his growth in about two months, and his voice came with his stature. On taking him up in the fall, he would occasionally

utter a low "gur-r-r-r," with rippling throat. I found him one morning on the water-hyacinth. He had to climb over a rockery set with cactus to get there; and in running from me he jumped square into one of the most spiny and vicious of these plants, apparently without injury to himself or the plant.

There used to be a belief that toads were poisonous. A dog will not hold one in his mouth very long, they say. I never hold them long that way, either. But I often hold them in my hand, to their distress probably, and find that they do not "give warts." And that belief is like many another. We ought to get up a society of exploders — men who will blow up fallacies of custom, government, laws, and quotation. How many venerable sayings would be killed off by such a society! You hear, for instance, that "you can't make bricks without straw." Unless you have been in the East, or in Mexico, which is much the same, you never saw a brick with straw in it. Haverstraw bricks have never a straw. They speak of elusive hopes as will-o'-the-

wisps. Well, there are no will-o'-the-wisps, except in scientific books. Shakspere tells us that "uneasy lies the head that wears a crown." Look at the crowned heads of Europe. Are they not a sleek, self-satisfied, well-fed, well-slept company of ornaments? Science, philosophy, and art need purgation by common-sense. The best have the most of this uncommon quality. People who describe great men they have seen always exhibit a dumb surprise that they look and act so like other folks. Greatness never consists in holding yourself above the mass, though you may need to stand at one side of it. You will not be seen at all unless you are content to stay at the human level. The great are great in common things. It is the clear, patent truth in Shakspere that is admirable.

Speaking of Shakspere does not remind me of our turtle. I just remembered him as one of our autumn enlivenments. He is the third we have owned, and was imported from New Jersey. I don't know what he finds to eat, but he is healthy and happy, though in these chilly mornings he

is apt to be sluggish. Like the toads, he has ability in self-effacement, and can stay lost by the quarter-hour in our few square feet of yard. The youngsters have named him Plato—the same being the name they called the others by, though one had been discovered to contain eggs. Why Plato, more than James Q. Smith, I do not know, unless it be for the gravity of the creature and the inscrutability of his wisdom.

The carpenter's dog is surprised and interested when Plato toddles across the yard. This dog climbs upon a lumber-pile to view the proceedings and bark his opinions. But the turtle does not mind. He travels about in his uncouth fashion, getting his meals; and after acquiring nutriment he likes to cover himself with an old sod at the back of the yard, where the sun shines warm. He will remain there, motionless, for hours; and wherever he may be carried, he will amble back to his sod at once. On being taken up, he hisses and retires promptly within his shell; though if put on the ground he will try to walk away, even when one is holding him. If

put into water, he tries to get out; but after a dry spell we have held him under running water, and have seen him drink, with a slow elongation of the neck at each swallow. On a mild morning, after rain, he takes a joy in promenades; and from the window he seems to be eating petunias and alyssum, snapping at them like a hen.

Our turtles, like other savages, have been spoiled by civilization. They fell into a way of coming into the house out of the cold. They did not learn that worms and things are not provided in a house; and as they refused to eat anything that we offered to them, they paid the penalty of culture with their lives. They refused to bury themselves as the cold increased, and lumbered into the kitchen whenever the door was opened, making something of a struggle to climb the step. They knew where it was warm; and if the door failed to open, they sat on the grass and became comatose, like beggars who faint of starvation or "throw fits" on your door-step in revenge for the refusal of drink-money and your second-best clothes.

Plato I. was especially persistent in coming in, so we let him have the run of the cellar. He stayed awake until January or so, bumbling around in the half-darkness, refusing such food as we offered to him, and drinking little; and so he wasted and died. Plato II. was equally stubborn. He was stupid on cold days, and often appeared to be dormant, for he would allow himself to be handled without waking. So we rolled him in a carpet, put him in a box in the shed, and expected him to sleep until spring. But when the weather modified he scratched his way to freedom again, and stayed out of doors for a day. Once I took him from his wrappings and set him on the grass. He awoke and maundered aimlessly about until the sun began to sink, when he drew into his shell and apparently went to sleep again. He was returned to his carpet and box, and after a series of bitter nights, when the mercury dropped to zero, he was found dead of freezing.

Our autumn insects are lively until after the frosts. One September day there is a

great to-do among the ants in the aster bed. Dozens of winged ants are out with them. All run in and out in desperate haste or anxiety. Wonder for what. Perhaps a fresh crop of young ones has arrived. Could the rain have beaten in their roofs? Is this a new arrival of slaves? Or are they holding an election?

One of the first indications of the oncoming cold is the retirement of the earthworms. Do they feel the chill at the surface, and burrow deeper to get away from it? Or do the roots of vegetation strike lower as the year wears on, and do the worms follow them, or keep away from the spread of their meshes? Men owe much to these humble creatures. Without worms to loosen the soil, the face of the earth would be a desert, dry, hard, incapable of supporting any other vegetation than cactus and sage-brush. The farmer could not exist if it were not for the worm. He swallows his way into the ground, ejecting the earth behind, instead of scratching his way in with claws that he does not have. And to think that these creatures lift to

the surface fifteen to twenty tons of earth to the acre in this manner every year! Soft as they are, their muscular tissue is not weak. Stamp your foot near them when they are lying half out of their holes at evening, and see how instantly they pull themselves in, out of sight.

One of them, a foot long, was found wriggling over our flagged walk, like a snake, in his haste to get to cover. I watched another, about six inches long when extended, crawling over the walk. On arriving at the flower-bed, rich and heavy with recent rain, he almost immediately began to dig. In four minutes by the watch he had buried himself, all but the tip of his tail. Fast going, for a creature that has no bony substance. When the yard has been manured and the rains are heavy, the worms appear in great abundance. They are slimy and loathsome until you come to know them; but when you discover use in things you cease to fret about their appearance. I can see that their burrowings and castings loosen and lighten the soil, and have never learned

that they injured vegetation. In this they differ from the insects that depredate among the leaves; and the dependence of animals on plants is painfully, exasperatingly obvious to any one who tries to raise the latter. It is the killing and exile of our birds, no doubt, that have caused such an alarming increase in vermin — weeds of the animal kingdom, creatures whose use has not been discovered. Animal life is in plant life everywhere. You find worms curled in the spore-cups of lichens.

I once found a shelf fungus draped with curling white threads, and wondered if they could be strings of loosening spores; but on breaking it open, I found grubs inside. The strings were their excreta. And even in water I have found earth-worms, though how long they had been there I don't know. Our water-hyacinth fell into a rusty aspect; but it doubled its blooms after I had taken it out of the jardinière that served as a tank for it and culled away full half its substance in dead leaves, bladders, and a few of the long, feather-like roots. It was in this process that I dis-

covered an earth-worm quite alive in the mud at the bottom. Had he been there during the weeks of the plant's growth, or had he just fallen in? Had he climbed the rockery, among the cacti, to reach the water; was he trying to drink, or had Reginald McGonigle tossed him in during an unbidden visit? One of these worms, dropped from a flower-pot, was found on the leaf of a pitcher-plant. His surprise and bewilderment were betokened by questioning ventures this way and that.

And as we have rotations in crops and weeds, so I find rotations of insects and things. This year the wire-worm is about in myriads, the wood-louse or sow-bug outdoes his brethren of last year five to one, the hard-shelled, swift-footed centiped is turned up so deep in the earth that I think he must use the holes of the angle-worms to get there, and the thrip is more plentiful on the roses. Next year it will be tarantulas and megatheriums, maybe. Reginald McGonigle is the only constancy.

We begin to prize the autumn greenery, and occasionally to put boxes or papers

over plants when a frosty night is threatening. The papers are generally blown about the premises before morning, and probably in their flight they break as much as they should have saved. Our calceolaria, having been pinched down, is blooming anew; our buttercup is still at it; the roses have a few belated buds; while the cosmos, with its honest, wholesome, daisy-like flowers and its feathery foliage, is just enjoying itself. One of our cosmos plants freaked in November in a singular fashion: one of its flower-stalks had thickened laterally until it was perhaps three quarters of an inch wide,—obviously the union of several stems,—and at its crest it bore a long comb of stamens and pistils, with a fringe of petals. This comb, or oval flower, must have consisted of at least five united flowers, and was three inches long. A potted dandelion sulks. I stripped the seeds from a head in the summer, and pressed them under the mold in the pot. They all came up together, a score of tiny green shoots; but perhaps because they crowded each other they stopped at an

inch. We have few thistles, for the lawn-mower gives little chance to them, and the Russian thistle has been frightened away to the west because of the laws against it. I wonder why they don't pass a law against jimson-weed, aphides, and Reginald McGonigle. I 'm sure they need it. But most likely it would never be enforced. Some barrister would lend himself to an opposition, and would cite acts of King Stephen or the Virginia colonizers to prove that these offenses had received a special sanctity. If chosen to the legislature, he might change his heart and his mind. Such things have been heard of, you know, as paying a lawyer a state salary to frame or pass laws in the legislature, and discovering him in court afterward in heated argument against the validity of his own laws.

Late fall and early spring are good seasons for the study of geology and mineralogy, as the vegetation is light, and the character of the ground may be seen. And our yard, in common with the other yards of this town and some thousands of miles of unyarded country, has had an

interesting history. Had I stood 18,000 years ago where I stand to-day when I weed the hydrangeas and stir the earth about the "pinys," I should have been facing a wall of ice, the receding glacier of the last Ice Age. And I and certain millions of others live on the debris of that glacier. This enormous mass, over a mile thick, moving sluggishly but irresistibly southward to its melting-point, brought with it millions of tons of sand, soil, gravel, and boulders, and dumped them into the Atlantic, building up from the bottom of that sea an island 120 miles long, and leaving parts of its moraine at other points between here and the Rockies. A conjunction of exterior planets had pulled at the earth by gravitative force, elongating its orbit, so that for some years the winters on the side slanted from the sun were lengthened and the summers shortened. The southern half of the globe will be frozen up in about 75,000 years, when the conjunction is repeated.

And in the light of such portentous events the back yard becomes important.

I know the locale of certain fragments that I find there — speaking now of minerals and rocks, instead of the commoner rags, boots, bottles, and other materials of "made land." The green mica I know comes from Fort George, New York; the green feldspar from a mile or two south of that point; the basalt from the palisades of the Hudson; the jasper from a now extinct reef of it which may be traced beneath that river; the serpentine from Hoboken; but mixed with these are specimens from the Hudson Highlands, the Adirondacks, the Connecticut hills, the Green Mountains, perhaps from those oldest hills of all, the Laurentians — a noble range, no doubt, that the glacier wore down to mere roots and stumps of its old self. When we record or guess upon these things, man and his work appear too trivial to think about, and time, space, mass, force, too great for his understanding. There is too, in the passing of the autumn, some hint of the cold death that must overtake the race of humankind, the world it lives in, and the solar system in which it moves. It is too vast and

lonely a theme for the imagination. By potting the plants for winter blooming, tearing up the faded annuals, setting bulbs that are to flower in spring, and mulching the beds against the coming of cold weather, one can forget these grandeurs, and his mind is comforted.

VIII

FLOWERS AND INSECTS

DID it ever come into your head that you were going to like something from merely hearing its name? When I was convalescing from an illness in my youth it occurred to me that I wanted a charlotte russe. I had never seen or tasted one of those confections; I hardly knew it from an oyster; but I longed for it—because I did. Invalids have that privilege. My parents went to a baker and had one made. It was one quart in content, and I ate it greedily to the last crumb, and have never cared much for charlotte russe since. Sometimes this gustatory exploit recurs to me when I find myself desiring with an equal ardor of sympathy or curiosity to own some object of natural interest or beauty. There was a crystal of epidote,

for instance, that had to be got for my little group of minerals. Why epidote more than rhodonite or dioptase, I do not know, unless it be that the name happened to be remembered from seeing a labeled specimen in childhood.

And so it was with the trillium. I had never seen one, yet I cared a good deal more for it than for a lilium. As I was more than forty years old before I saw one, there should have been a lack of enthusiasm in getting it; but the exuberance of youth came over me at the moment, and I never coddled anything into health with more care than I did that waxen flower and its broad, frank setting, after I had lodged it in a shady corner of my city yard. Was it the name that made me like it? Trillium! There is music in it; there is a sense of wildness; it ripples on the tongue; it has cadence, and somehow it suggests the woods. As in all spring flowers, there is refinement in it, a delicacy and modesty; but, unlike most of the blossoms of its season, it has dignity and substance. Its petals are large for the time.

If it belongs to the rank of floral infants, it is at least one of those big, healthy, composed infants that are born at an advanced age and are advising their elders at five. What is of moment, it blooms and flourishes in the wild corner of our yard.

Rather opposed to the trillium, with its choiceness and aristocracy, is the mustard. This cheap and frequent plebeian riots in the mean places of the town—the empty lots, the littered street sides. Just as the summer had opened I found a black mustard (why black? for the *Brassica nigra* has n't a bit of black about it) that had sported, as the florists say, producing white instead of yellow blossoms. Undeterred by recent failures with wild clover, some ferns, and some violets, I transplanted the weed to the yard. Sharp differences of soil no doubt kill these things, where breaking of the roots may not, and when the mustard collapsed I supposed it was done for; but in a week or two it put out buds, though it did not straighten from its wilted attitude for a month, and after a little it flowered copiously. It is surprising what a number

of things get in your way when you look for them. Since finding the white sports on mustard I have looked for others and discovered them by dozens. This sporting is not uncommon, though there is always a tendency to revert to the original type after gardeners have succeeded in turning the freak into a seeming permanence. Our chrysanthemums were never truly fine but once, and that was when they came from the conservatory. Since then they have been made small and unreliable.

A red petunia paled on my hands, and on some of the other petunias there were freaks of doubling. One whole plant of this species threatened for a time to sport into the double variety, for its stamens thickened into petals, white and plainly visible in the purple throat of nearly every flower. The dianthus was unaccountable. It sent up an extraordinary variety of bloom — single, double, red, pink, white, nearly black, in all patterns and shades. Our nasturtiums, too, raised from the seed of last summer's plants, show new colors since last year. Our early chrysan-

themums — feverfew, or "featherfew" as a florist calls them — are full of sports, singles and doubles, yellows and whites, growing on the same bush.

If we are surprised by atavism in the human species, there is at least as much reason to be puzzled by the pranks of heredity in plants. Here is a pansy below our window that bears blossoms of a royal purple throated with gold. Explain, if you can, why it yields one morning a blossom of white edged with sky-blue. Has some ancestral cross in fertilization, or some parent type, asserted itself again? The azalea often — indeed, usually — sports into foreign colors, the red issuing a dozen white blossoms, and vice versa. A double petunia that I got, with a noble, rose-like flower of crimson velvet, turned its blooms into magenta banded with white after getting into our ground, and finally settled into that form. One of our irises, which we soak at the roots in spring to make them remember their marshy habitat, petaling in mauve and white, carried a stalk of deep purple

blossoms. Again, how is it accounted for?

Equally curious with the sports are the exhibitions of plant intelligence. Climbing vines generally exercise a good caution as to the way they will support themselves. They act almost as shrewdly as animals. But now and then they are fooled. A sweet-pea in our yard caught a loose end of string that was fluttering from the fence; but finding, after one of its tendrils had taken about five turns at the very end that it had no stability, it lengthened and strengthened the tendril into a kind of stem that held this string at arm's length, so it might delude no other branch. And the satisfaction that a plant seems to feel when it gets where it wants to be must extend itself to the beholder. A lantana that I bought of a huckster as a commonplace bit of greenery spread into a bush five feet wide and full of bloom in a piece of dry, poor, sun-heated soil. And I can't help thinking that men would be a good deal like our lantana, only they hate to leave their greenhouse,—the city,—and

stand the sun and wind, even with a promise of flowering into genius. The mass of us dread change. We don't want our roots disturbed. Even with our communistic tendency, we are so fond of ourselves, even the worst of us, that we would think twice about swapping places with other people. As to exchanging personalities — never! We might want their advantages, but would prefer to have them without the penalty of assuming their bodies and minds. But what a confession of helplessness this communism is! One Thoreau is worth twenty of us, for he dared to live his own life. Specializing of industries has made us dependent on each other, and society is become an exchange. But why should I give fifty per cent. of my effort for fifty per cent. of some other man's? Why not keep my hundred per cent., especially as I keep my personality with it?

Let 's see: where was I? Oh, yes; my lantana. Ill-smelling, rather, and thorny, but showy, clean, and reliable. With the waning of the season it began to be im-

portant, and arose to a certain arboreal dignity. Its clusters of yellow and orange blossoms always drew the eye from the window — the back one, of course; for there 's a big difference between the front and the back view, even when the yard is in its winter burial of manure and snow. The front view bespeaks artifice, restraint, and the maker of them — man. The back view is just a peep at the page of nature. We cannot cut the leaves, or get the covers wide apart in the yard, but we can read a comforting sentence or two. We can't raise anything in our strip of front yard: Mrs. Mulcahey's goats from the next street don't allow it.

Every year's experience with plants confirms one in respect for their courage, resolution, and vitality. They ask only half a show, unless they are pampered children of the tropics. I put out our sick araucaria to die, for it had been hurt by the carelessness of a servant and was dropping its branches. I was assured that there was no help for it. Pulling it out of its pot, I thrust it negligently into the nearly worth-

less soil at the back of the yard. It began to brace up. Then I put it into better earth, where it was shaded in the afternoon, and it grew and became a respectable tree, barring its lost branches.

The golden-rod, too, is a determined plant. When a stalk of it finds that it cannot reach straight up to the sunshine, it lies down and works along sidewise until it is clear of obstruction, when it turns an angle and stands up. It does other queer things. I took off half of a tall stem; this amputation affected the half that was left only in that it doubled its foliage, putting out fresh leaves in the axils of the old. Many plants make up for docking or interference by a continuous or extra output of leaves or flowers. Our hollyhock was kept in bloom unusually long by picking off the flowers as they went to seed. The spike that bore the blossoms kept growing longer as the lower flowers were cut away, until it was perhaps seven and a half feet high, and it kept blooming until frost. A dahlia stripped to the stalks by caterpillars recouped after a little, and at the end of the season had a finer, glossier coat of

green than our neighbors' dahlias. A horse-chestnut in our town whose leaves had been destroyed by the tussock-moth began life over in October, and put out not only fresh leaves, but blossoms.

Picking off a double white petunia that had faded, I was surprised to see, through a rent in its petals, what seemed like a flower. Pulling off the corolla, this seeming was found to be true. A folded blossom, as large as two peas, lay within the petals and stamens; and one of the petals of this infolded flower was the pistil of the outer one. Nor was this instance unique, for I found a flower within a flower on the same plant afterward. Equally odd was a performance of the bellis as it was going out of bloom in late July. One of its blossoms put forth two minor ones, not from the stalk, but from the disk, or base of the disk, itself. A sepal, in that case, became a stalk. Another sepal had enlarged and had developed imperfect leaves. One of the calendulas repeated this trick of the bellis, no less than three flower-buds growing from the edge of one of its flowers.

Plants may have wens and warts, too,

besides those galls and swellings made by stings of insects. Our smallest flowered petunia put out a runner near ground; and as it had been planted near the stone walk, the runner rambled out upon the flagging. Where the weight of it came upon the stone, a callous tumor, or corn, was formed, as large as the end joint of a man's thumb, and studded with dwarfed or aborted leaves so thick that they were like moss. Working among the sweet alyssum once, I turned back a mass of long stalks, which flower incessantly until the cold, to let in the light on a patch of seeded earth; and after thus turning it several of the stems were found to be thickened and enlarged where they had rested on the ground.

A white weed which we call the daisy, the bellis being the English daisy, has likewise demeaned itself queerly. It is a plant rescued from a dusty, vacant lot and made to increase and improve. Turning back a mat of its new growth, a sturdy shoot was disclosed beneath it; and this shoot, almost a branch, terminated in a star of over thirty young leaves, most of them on stalks a

couple of inches long. In the heart of this rosette was a stemless flower-bud.

Where do all these things come from that pop out of the earth while your back is turned, and that, too, after you have browsed through the yard for weeks, pulling up with trowel and fingers every suspicious thing? In one of the beds thus attended I found a self-heal, or prunella; and, being there, I let it flower, and eke encouraged it. Though a country-loving plant, it thrives in town on neglected streets and among the cast-off bed-springs and dry-goods of vacant lots. It is a frugal flower, for it does not lavish its blossoms in a day, but puts out alternate flowers in alternate rows. The blooms are like dragon-heads, but of a more intense purple before opening than afterward.

Dead leaves have many pranks. You find them caught and impaled on trees they never grew upon; and finding them thus misplaced, and carelessly assuming that they belong and were green there, you make a note of the apple-tree with chestnut leaves and the elm that grows like an oak.

One amazing patch of ground, not far from our house, is grown over with cat-brier; and after a gale all the waste paper in the county seems to have blown there and caught in the thorns of it, so that from a distance the waving and fluttering are as of an army with banners. On a windy day in early spring I found a dead leaf spinning like a windmill. Ordinarily a leaf will turn a few times, then turn back; but this whirligig kept on endlessly in the same direction. I looked at it closely. It was an elm leaf blown from a distant tree and caught by the stem in a cat-brier tendril. It had freedom of rotation, but a swell in the stem prevented it from falling out, while a curve in the leaf gave the wind a purchase on it.

But these antics and occasionals are of moment only as they enforce notice to the steadiness, order, and beauty that are everywhere — qualities that escape us because we take them for granted. For the best is the cheapest, and the very best costs nothing. Air, water, room to move, friendship, love, these have no money value.

The beauty of nature, that is constantly offered and frequently spurned, is always there for the looking and smelling and hearing. But we prize best what is bought with some cost of human muscle, blood, sin, virtue, or cash — especially cash. If dandelions were made in Birmingham at £1 10*s.* 6*d.* a gross, many ships would be laden with them every spring. If they were tin ones made to look like real, they would have a good sale, anyway. In funerals it will be noticed that the importance of the man in the coffin is usually in inverse ratio to the number of the carriages that follow him. In life it is noise and difficulty that advertise some men. Flowers would be more admired if they barked.

It is not the exception that is wonderful: it is the steadfast. Yet perpetuation and duplication, which to us are order, are perhaps a proof that nature proceeds along the lines of least resistance. It is easier to imitate than to invent. The flowers, the crystals, the planets, the water-drops, are orderly in form and conduct. Look at a mullein leaf. Its velvet is a crowd of

stars. In very soft leaves these stars have branches. The insect wandering among them should know a delight as wild as that of a man in a jungle.

Oh, yes, we agree that the insect goes to the flower to feed; but why is the flower made beautiful for him as well as savory? Has the insect an esthetic sense? If so, it means more than ours, for color to him is life. The guide-lines in the flowers are ways to the honey. And look through a magnifier and see into what palaces the fly is bidden. With your eye at the lens, you are a fly yourself. Take the tiny nettle. What a hall of pearl and amethyst! What purple frescos, what rich, dewy, nectarous translucency! We could not in a home of porcelain environ ourselves like that; but perhaps we shall try. A dining-hall of rose and yellow, for example, with no windows, but walls and roof soft shining, full of fragrance. Will man ever be kind and fine enough to fit such a place? Can he ever live as gaily as the bee?

That reminds me that I had the family

out the other day — a raw morning in early June — to look at the grandfather of all bumblebees, who had alighted in a blossom of the pale yellow iris. He was not fertilizing it, because he was under the petal that bears that delicate brush of stamens, so we thought he was probably boring for nectar through the petal, or sucking it through some tiny aperture we could not see, as his abdomen was working strongly. On lifting the petal and even touching him with a pencil, he showed no sense of disturbance. His wings were closely folded, and the flower was heavy, cold, and wet, as everything was in that chill morning. Perhaps he was a little benumbed. At last a prod with the pencil angered him, and swinging down from the flower, he bumbled off through the yard, finally alighting on a peony.

Occasionally bees wrangle over the right to a flower, and two such I found in a regular wrestle. They were not so determined but that they could fly a little, yet with obvious lack of mutuality in purpose, falling to the ground, rolling over

and over, and clawing the grass with their hind legs to secure a hold. They were locked in such a hug, face to face, that they endured some ducking with the hose before they broke away, and were so exhausted they could hardly fly.

Could it have been a worker that had followed a drone into our premises to exterminate him at the time of the annual massacre?

Doubtless we are illogical to take such displeasure at humble creatures in their larval state, while we joy so greatly in their completed form; but so long as flowers and foliage are fairer than grubs, it will be so. Though I wage war on caterpillars that I find consuming our floral pets, I confess that now and then I remit the penalty in the case of some big and well-marked fellow, for the promise he has in him of being a handsome butterfly. I toss him over the fence, because our neighbors don't care as much for flowers as we do. Odd creatures, some of these larvæ! The *limacodida* that I found under maples in Connecticut and oaks in Georgia is a flat,

green object with moss-like fringe in place of feet; it moves by inflations. I put it on its back, and by these same inflations, beginning at the tail and running upward toward the head, it arched itself more and more until its balance was destroyed and it tipped over, right side up. It is a notable simulator of a leaf, and might easily be concealed by its color in vegetation.

Men, also, take on more shape and color from their diet, their work, and their surroundings than we realize. There is still some granite in the New England character, some heat in the tropical temperament. Sometimes, though, it does n't improve one to become an adult. He is better in the larval stage of youth. Life mocks us when it reverses a promise. I used to know a juvenile phenomenon. At sixteen he played on the piano uncommonly well —with his fingers. His music lacked soul. "Never you mind," said his father, with a wise nod; "all that Nicodemus needs to finish him is to fall in love. Then you 'll hear expression. Then you 'll find warmth. Then you 'll get soul." Nicodemus fell in

love. He played better. Nicodemus married. Nicodemus is finished. He does not play at all.

Evolution sometimes becomes involution in the human specimen, even when nothing is gained by it. With the insect there is little change, except for advantage. The safety of certain moths that look most like leaves or bark has made a tendency of their type toward this imitation. Members of the family that missed the likeness were eaten. Certain butterflies have succeeded in looking so like another and unpalatable species that the birds let them alone.

Peskiest of all our minor plagues are the plant-lice, or aphides. The poppies, though they bloom freely and gorgeously, are marvelously beset. (I want to mention our servant's regard for these flowers — the few that she takes a little pains not to walk over when she is hanging up the clothes. "Why, they 're just as pretty as paper flowers," says she.) Running a poppy leaf between thumb and finger, I often slay a hundred of these aphides.

Are they of varying species on different plants, or is it their diet of differing juices that makes them seem different? On the golden-rod they are blood-red and are lively — for aphides. On house-plants I have never seen them other than green. On one camomile that stands against a fence in the sun they are pale brown or buff, nearly colorless in young specimens; and on another in rich, damp earth in a shady corner they are lead-colored or black. In the middle of June the young shoots on these plants are crusted with them. Ants were busy milking the lice on the shaded plant; but I saw none of them on the camomile that had the light.

There are no closer ties between our present day of hope and original sin than these aphides and Reginald McGonigle. The aphides are a little the worse, because they are silent and sneaking in their habit, whereas Reginald commits his misdemeanors with yells and howls and snorts and stones and shocking language, and can therefore be traced. Whatever may be alleged against Reginald and his compan-

ions, they do not steal along the under side of the poppies, tapping their vital juices and, one would suppose, indulging in opium drunkenness. Hardly any plant is secure against the aphis. His fat little body, moving almost as slow as a snail even after he has begotten wings,— a thing I am sure Reginald will never come to,— sprinkles itself alike over leaves and stems, and occasionally the flowers, of chrysanthemums, roses, lilies, ivy, golden-rod, and oxalis. The hairy defense of the zinnia does not trouble him, and neither heat, moisture, dryness, nor fetor makes him lose his grip. If he should let go of anything, the caterpillar and beetle and grasshopper are just behind and have good appetites. He breeds with amazing rapidity, multiplying almost before your eyes. Often he develops into a pest overnight. He is the cow of the red ant. The ant scales the stalk where this dull-witted, fat, slow-bodied creature is guzzling the sap, and pats and strokes its belly. The aphis gives up something of the sap, and the ant regales upon it. This enables the aphis to

hold more, and he applies himself to nursing with fresh vigor. Better to be encouraged than the ant, in such a case, is the lady-bug, for she feeds on the young of aphides. All of the lady-bugs we find we carry to our yard, where we could find work for a thousand.

Do you suppose these "critters" talk? I am sure that some kind of understanding exists among them. They seem a peaceable lot, and when I have watched them through a magnifier have never found a riot going on. Their antennæ seem to be telling things to each other. That they have audible speech I doubt; for if they had they would use up more energy in it. Speech has been called incipient action; but it is n't. It is the best preventive of action that ever was invented. It is the safety-valve through which force discharges itself—the force which, if kept back in silence, would set engines throbbing, and rend away the crusts of custom. If anarchists had the public squares for their meetings, there would be no throwing of bombs. Peaceful drinking of beer would

be the only sequence. Don't make silence compulsory. Never fasten down the lid of a pot filled with boiling water. You only make a man think Damn harder when you try to dam his speech or thought. Yet, oh, what inanities of action in speech! I used to be visited every day by a man who wanted to be told what the weather was likely to be next morning.

Bats are said to live on insects, and probably it is our wealth in the latter that brings so many bats flitting about the house in twilight. One of them got indoors on a July midnight and waked me with the whirring of his wings. As all our windows had screens in them, he must have come down the chimney and entered an upper room through the fireplace. He flew about at such a pace that I could not at first tell what he was, and might have thought him to be a swallow if we had such birds. He made no cry. After I had lighted the gas he circled around and around the room at the top of his speed, the eye hardly following him. No doubt he was bewildered, and wanted to get out.

Without the least intention of doing a hurt, and meaning only to stop his flight so that I could seize and put him out of doors, I struck at him with a cloth. Either he was tender or I struck harder than I knew, for the blow killed him.

Bats or no bats, there is no let up to the life of the yard. It is gay with butterflies, moths, bee-flies, bees,—honey and bumble, —wasps, and what not. The butterflies are eager creatures, and when they alight on a new star in the crown of a zinnia they fasten to it as if they had the thirst of a week to slake. One of the busiest that I saw had a half-circle missing from his wings, the gap fitting both as he folded them together. Evidently the missing parts had been bitten out by a cat—a fifth of their substance gone. But he did not seem to mind it.

Our jimson-weed grows apace with the summer, and is eight feet high, ten feet wide, and filled with flowers. In the twilight its blossoms are visited by the night-moth, who drops in his immensely long proboscis—a good four inches, one would

say—and pumps at their honey with many a pull and hitch as he hovers above them on æolian wing. He has eyes only for his supper, and has passed within half a foot of our hands and has sucked honey so close under our eyes that we had to move back to see him. Could any one abuse with capture a confidence like that? This busy reveler in the dark is so like a humming-bird in size, mode of flight, and way of life, that when I first saw him against the sky I was sure that he wore feathers.

There are other visitors to the same weed: trig spiders, miniature tigers who flatten themselves against the leaves and spring out on flies bigger than themselves; butterflies of the day, fair as blossoms; and two fat and loathly green grubs—tobacco-worms they are called—so like rolled leaves that they run a chance of being handled by looking like that. One of these grubs I took indoors and stabled on a stramonium leaf, covering him with a glass dish, slightly raised, to admit air. He was a tight sticker, and on every attempt to move him uttered an angry objection—

a clicking noise like the gritting of teeth. Probably it was his mandibles striking together. In the evening he had a hundred cocoons fastened to his sides and back. The larvæ of the ichneumon wasp that had been preying on his muscles, having grown from eggs deposited by that parasitic creature beneath the caterpillar's hide, had eaten their way to the surface and spun their cases. The fellow grew thin and died in a couple of days. His mate went through the same experience—grubs, cocoons, and death.

Hardly less beautiful than the butterflies are the dragon-flies with soap-bubble colors on their wings. I found one of unusual size with a broken wing in the yard. His best color was in his eyes, which were like cabochon sapphires, very large. On attempting to fly, he would fall to the ground, or cling to a leaf and lift his tail in a half-circle as if trying to sting. I found him dead on the walk in the evening.

A colored man brought to me one of these handsome dragon-flies, or "devil's-darning-needles" as they used to be called

in my boyhood. He had struck it in fear, and the creature was all but dead. "Oh, they 've got a terrible stinger," said he, as he cautiously delivered the fly into my outstretched palm. And he was surprised and half incredulous when I told him that the poor thing was not only harmless, so far as we are concerned, but that it was one of our best friends, as it preyed on the mosquito. It has been a theory of mine that a few patent facts ought to be taught in the primary schools. Here is this dragonfly. In my childhood I was seriously told that if I allowed one to alight on me it would sew up my ears. That scared me so that it did not at once occur to me that perhaps it was n't necessary to sit still and be sewed. In New York City a panic occurred in a public school because a dragonfly came in at an open window. Several children were hurt in the rush for the stairs. Yet I suppose all of those boys and girls could have figured out one of those useful and instructive problems about what is the price of potatoes in Schoharie County if they are selling in Putnam County for $11\frac{6}{77}$ cents

a peck, and the price in Schoharie is $\frac{4}{15}$ of $6\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. higher than it is in Putnam. The farmers seemed to me to be gifted with absolute mathematical genius when I read about them in the arithmetics. Perhaps degeneration has set in among them since my school-days. Perhaps they don't hold out now for a forty-seventh of a cent on a potato trade. Perhaps—

There 's that McGonigle boy trying to stamp down our new rose-bushes! I must pause for a moment to kill him.

No; he has escaped, and is at this moment uttering gibes from the stronghold of his own yard. I fear that Reginald was born with a desire to rule. He has chosen the wrong time and the wrong land to do it. Most people do like to rule, if it comes to that; but see how unfair it is to the other people, because they want to do the same thing. There is one thing worse, and that is to be ruled. Still, in our cities we cannot complain, for there we are seldom governed: we are merely taxed. It will make Reginald quite unhappy, when he grows up, to realize how little restraint

we need from outside. Rhode Island had no constitution until fifty years ago. Few knew it, and nobody was the worse. England cannot prove that she has one at this day. A man who is sure of $1000 a year is above government. He can afford to watch with a careless eye the struggles of Reginald's father to get city contracts.

I turn with pleasure from the contemplation of Reginald to the fire-flies. We enjoy their mild pyrotechnics in the evening. It is another rural pleasure that may pertain to a city lot. One evening a visitor spryly caught one in his hand—a proceeding that I disapprove. In a trice he had pinched off the creature's abdomen and crushed the rest of him. He explained: "The scientific sharps have told us that the light dies with the animal. It does n't, as you see." He caught a second and served it in the same way, only he slashed open the abdomen with a knife. I put both of these remnants between the lenses of a double magnifier for safe-keeping, and set them away. At midnight, four hours later, the one that had been cut open with the knife

had faded, though it still gave out a little light; but the sac which was whole glowed as brightly, for aught I could see, as when the animal wore it. Had I been a true observer I would have sat up with those relics and recorded the hour when the glow disappeared. But I have a living to earn for my family, and must sleep. In the morning the remnants were taken to a dark closet for inspection, but their fires were absolutely cold.

There was a tragedy on a daisy disk. One of the fire-flies, or lightning-bugs (it is not a fly, and its shine is not a bit like lightning, so why not glow-bug?), was eating or drinking when a large yellow-brown spider pounced upon him, and so an end. The fire-fly was lying on his back, dead, in the grasp of the spider, who with his hind legs seemed to retain his hold on the flower while I shook it, keeping his fangs buried in the abdomen of his victim. I lifted the fellow to the window-sill, and without relaxing his hold for an instant he trotted off with the fly, as a dog will sometimes carry an object of nearly his own

size, or as an ant will carry one larger than himself. The spider retired into a crevice behind the sash to finish his meal at leisure.

Other spiders, large, healthy, lithe, black, marked with bright yellow on the back, have nested in the iris. Another, a brown fellow, has made a bag of his web, running it around several leaves with its surface parallel to the ground; but the black ones spin theirs vertically between pairs of leaves, with extra-strong webbing in the center, where they stand much of the time. On an alarm these cobs will vanish; but if anything drops into their web they pounce on it like cats. I put some small caterpillars into one web. Instantly the spider was upon them. He would put his feet on the fuzzy body of the animal, as if hesitating whether to kick him out or eat him, but really I suppose he was preparing to spin; then, with remarkable facility, he would roll him around and around, so that in a few seconds the caterpillar was incased in a shroud of web, and the spider resumed his patient watch for flies. Evidently this kind of meat was rank for his taste.

But in each case the caterpillar worked his way out of the bag and tumbled down among the roots of the iris; so perhaps the spider merely tied him up to save the web.

One caterpillar crossed from leaf to leaf on a strand of web, as deftly as if he had been an habitual rope-walker. My oldest boy fed insects to a spider, and reported a capacity on the latter's part of fifteen flies an hour, and you could nearly see the spider swell. Yet once, when I gave a small white caterpillar to our biggest spider, she rolled her prey in web, as usual. Then I blew upon her. She may have suspected mischief from that breath, because she ran into a lower corner of her house; whereas the shaking of iris leaves by the wind had never bothered her. Soon the caterpillar freed his head and began to work his way out. The spider was after him once more, and this time remained, eating him, as it seemed, through the cover. This cob eats her own kind, too; for we found the remains of another species of spider in the web. There must have been

a fight. Sometimes a spider will eat her own husband. That morning, too, a newcomer, a child, had taken up her residence in the same web, and was living on friendly terms with its builder. It may have been the cats, or the Monday wash, or Reginald McGonigle, but twenty-four hours later that web was gone. The elder cob had set up a new establishment four or five inches nearer to the fence, and the young one had started her abattoir in another part of the iris clump. A month later our champion spider disappeared, and a leaner one occupied her place. We had fed her liberally with insects, and perhaps she had burst. Before her heir followed this example of disappearance — mayhap from the same cause, for she was a spoiled child — she had hung a papery bag — of eggs, I presume — from one of the iris stalks. We found these bags in the iris in the dead of winter.

City sounds grow dull; the perfume of the lilies, most luscious of odors, comes on a stir of air. There is a chirp of crickets under the balsams. A heavy bell a couple

of miles away is striking twelve. It brings back memories of bells in New England, where the hour sounds with a slower stroke and an older tone than here. An old moon rises in the clear sky, and the yard takes on a mystery through which the mind's eye reads the way to fairer, greener spots that some long, long day hence it may see with the eye of the body. Or must it be with the spirit eye alone?

IX

THE SOUL OF NATURE

THE Greeks had little to say about nature, but they lived closer to it than we do, in spite of our habit of painting, describing, and gushing over it. Carlyle, no doubt, would have said, from their very silence and unconsciousness, that nature was a part of their lives. They did feel and love it. We need no other proof than this: that they endowed it with godhood. They felt what science knows and the poet and preacher hope: that our relation to the universe is wide-spreading, though unfathomed. What is behind this mask of form we are not resolved, yet every primitive people realizes that it is a sign and an emblem, and the speech of this realization is poetry. The Indians of our Northwest are Greeks in their faith; they people the

woods and waters, the mountains, the geysers and the glaciers, with supernatural beings, and the legendry of that region is full of the action, baneful and heroic, that is worked by those forces. Later philosophies, in prose and verse, thrill with a hope that is faith, already, among these tribes.

"Manfred" is a wild dream, is it not? the summoning of spirits from other worlds — absurd? Yet they tell us that a responsive vibration goes through the world whenever a thing is done, as widening circles spread from where the stone falls into water; that, as thought is deed accompanied by motion in the brain, the working out of that thought affects, be it never so faintly, the gravities and substances of farthest suns. Is this a forecast of the energy that shall one day blaze from the mind of the race to lighten those chasms of cold that gulf our world in, and send messages of divine equality and brotherhood to the planets that roll about Sirius and Aldebaran? It tells, at all events, the oneness of creation, the refinement of mat-

ter into mind. We are the spirits of the universe, emanations in fleshly guise. In our best moods we approach that larger soul of nature and try to read it or impress it. Some instinct to create or command seems to work in us whenever we meet it face to face.

The growth of science and the literary and artistic use of landscape prove a present interest in nature that hardly seems to have belonged to our grandfathers, to whom — honored pioneers!—it was a task-master rather than a friend. To them it was raw material to subjugate, to use, but not to study or to love. Yet man is but a piece of the world, and we must read his environment to know his relations and understanding. Our liking for brevities and essences we acquire from our preference for men in the presence of nature; for men are nature personated, crystallized. So we watch the light from the cabin shining on the mountain, rippling across the lake, or gleaming out at sea, and we forget the darkness and majesty that it illumines, and that more solemn shining of the god-lights in the sky.

Certain of us huddle into cities to shut out the sight of woods and hills, saying: "A god is there. Eternity is symbolized yonder. Let us get together and deal with our affairs, of which gods and eternity are not yet part."

Yet we are compelled back, every now and again; for it is food and breath and physical life that we have out of nature, even where there is no joy or brightness. Like wine, it can exhilarate and debauch; but, unlike wine, we cannot live without it. Every normal temperament pines for the earth at times, and art is only a form of this longing, so far as it concerns itself with landscape. The painter tells it on canvas; we hear it in the *Waldweben* of Wagner and the "Pastoral Symphony" of Beethoven; among modern writers Thackeray is almost alone in being without it — he preferred the streets; but it is voiced in clear and beautiful tones by Thoreau, Emerson, Wordsworth, Blackmore, Burroughs, Black, of Scotland; White, of Selborne; Miss Thomas, and Miss Murfree. Hawthorne exclaims: "Oh, that I could run

wild! that I could put myself into a true relation with nature, and be on friendly terms with all congenial elements!" How many have echoed such a wish, for the mystery of the world is on the hills, and a subtle friendship broods in the wood. At times the mystery seems about to be revealed to us; yet, though we look and listen, the sphinx lips are closed, and we cry: "Let us know this secret."

Still we must not peer too closely, nor lose the larger view of things. Men are great, generous, beautiful only in their obvious aspects; so let us heed our books, songs, pictures, cathedrals, and other works of our kind. Must we know the chemistry of soils and leaves to see heaven on earth?

We have come to that time when we begin to feel as well as to see in the presence of woods, hills, oceans, and stars; there are hints and portents in them that a new consciousness tries to read. There is an invitation to conquest that makes us delight in peril and seek it in the deeps and on the alps. If eased of our flesh, we would ride on the storm and bathe in

lightning. And what analogies there are between nature and man's work and experience: illusion, elusion, suffering—qualities that make art. Men overdo before they learn to do; nature teaches reserve, order, accomplishment, economy. Have you thought how nature fits herself to every human mood — that is, how the mind discovers answering moods in nature — as well as sustains us in every corporal need? All seems open for our view into the heart of the world; but, as we look, a spell is thrown over us, and the green brightens with Turner's gold or pales into Corot's mist of silver; or in the hills, and oftener in the desert, on a few lucky days of a life, rise towers of gold and crystal gemmed with sapphire and topaz and backed by peaks of opal. Our hard and searching glance is baffled by these splendors. The kindly sun, the free wind, balm-laden, the grateful color, the tinkle of brooks, the lilt and whistle of birds, the toss and sough of boughs, the spring of turf, the beat of waves, placate, yet encourage and rejoice, and create or fill our worthiest moods. We

feel our avatar and almost see the hand that offers it. Fears of the ennui of eternity leave us, for we find that existence can be a joy. Nature will not press us back to savagery so long as we keep in touch with the striving spirit that animates all things, that has given wings to the reptile and let man evolve from the monkey.

There is deep truth in the allegory of Hercules's opponent who regained his strength whenever he touched the earth, and was not vanquished until he had been held in air so long that his power had left him. Simple forms, like the jelly-fish, that keep near nature and are elementary, have powers of creation and recuperation that make us ridiculous; and the trees, also, draw life right out of the soil. Why might not we do so, too, instead of taking what the trees have taken—we parasites of parasites?

The life that was potent in cosmic dust and chaos flame inheres in silence, and those of subtler sight and hearing commune with it. We need to go back to the fields to renew mental and spiritual strength, to cool our brains after they have been

heated by the excitements and intemperances of social life, to rest our nerves after the jarring of coarse utilities. The repose of the earth, the sky, and the waters is valuable, if only to show how much may be told and done without fretting and without speech; and little of our talk is needed. In politics alone, what words! what friction! what rivalry! what hatred! Suns, and clouds of suns, wheel through space, perhaps around some pivot of intelligence, and make no sound; but the choice of a man to do a little work for us fills the land with babbling and strife. Is not this much ado about nothing to speak of enough to drive a man to the woods, there to cast about for facts and affections that are worthy of him? There he is among objects that are idyllic, or that, at least, do not obtrude their functions. They are notes in a harmony, colors in a prism; they exist for an occult purpose which, in our present development, we only and vaguely recognize as beauty. Though we are apart from them, they follow us, and their charm is tender and alluring in their absence, be-

cause memory is an artist, and paints a better picture than the retina. When we turn from the actual scene we seem to know it better, and to find a higher promise and beauty there. So does art soften detail, suppress, select, and try to give us the substance, perhaps the soul, of things.

A spiritualizing process is beginning in letters, art, music, color, life. "The world is too much with us," but men are getting away from the base world of needs to the world of meanings. They progress as they realize beauty, and the constant inference of beauty is design. Can the fire of the diamond, the tenderness of the flower, the loveliness of the opal, the grandeur of the mountain, be accidental? Are they not part of some great scheme for the all-beautiful and all-good?

Nature piques, then eludes us; rejoices us, and will not tell how or why. We find her a mystery, and we are ever trying to get behind that mystery, even though what is fair in distance may be unlovely and unprofitable at close hand. It is not enough that we master inert physical na-

ture, that we make her give us food and house, that she turns mills and propels ships for us; love and questioning of her mean more than that: they signify an effort spiritually to envelop her; they prove an aspiration in the soul of man toward universality — toward godhood. That is their drift. To what will it lead?

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